Overcoming the GIANTS in your life

Biblical insights
on victorious living
and receiving God's promised blessings

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You Will Face “Giants”

There is no doubt that you will face “giants” throughout your lifetime. They are “mean and ugly” and desire to defeat and destroy you. How should you respond? Will you be like those cowering Israelites who backed down in fear and chose to avoid them even though it meant losing the bountiful blessings of the Promised Land? Or will you be counted with courageous Joshua and Caleb who, in the name of the Lord, desired to boldly engage and defeat their enemy giants and gain entrance into the land flowing with milk and honey?

This book will provide powerful biblical insight, not only on how to persevere in the battle against the “giants” in your life, but also how to overcome and conquer them so you can receive the promised blessings of God.

ISRAEL, AN EXAMPLE FOR US

In Numbers chapters 13 and 14 (take some time to read both chapters), God uses the nation of Israel as an example for us today. Reflecting back on this time of repeated failures in Israel’s history, the Apostle Paul informs us that they are to serve as reminders for us as New Testament believers:

> Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us... (1 Corinthians 10:6, 11).

A similar warning is issued in the book of Hebrews:

> Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was He angry

> for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter His rest if not to those who disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience (Hebrews 3:16-19; 4:11).

The Israelites made several fatal mistakes that we would be wise to never forget, lest we repeat them. Throughout their journey in the wilderness, the Israelites would discover what it was like to have the Lord against them, but they also saw how the Lord their God carried them, as a father carries his son (Deuteronomy 1:31).

So, let's explore their failures and God's dealings with them to gain the insight necessary to not only face, but to triumph over, the "giants" in our lives!

Giants in the Land

After leaving Egyptian bondage, the goal of the people of Israel was to enter the land that the Lord had promised them. When they came to the edge of the land, Moses sent 12 men to spy out Canaan:

> The LORD said to Moses, "Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders." So at the LORD's command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites. At the end of forty days they returned from exploring the land (Numbers 13:1-3, 25).

Numbers chapters 13 and 14 provide an excellent summary of the exploration and report of the spies, as well as the people's response. This Bible account contains crucial wisdom and vital lessons for us today. The Israelites' response and resulting consequences of unbelief, murmurings, disobedience and rebellion supply a clear understanding of God's requirements of faith and obedience from His people—no matter the circumstance.

FEARFUL, FAITHLESS RESPONSE

After forty days, the 12 spies returned and accurately reported that there were giants in the land. The *report* of the giants is not what led to their defeat; rather their fearful, faithless *response* to the giants sealed their fate. As they neared their goal, Israel was confronted with giants. Isn't that just the way it is? When we are about to achieve our goal and accomplish that which the Lord has led us to do, or when He leads us to step out in faith, we come up against "giants." Let me interject here and suggest that, if we are

not facing some "giants," perhaps we are back in "Egyptian bondage" and not letting our lives really count for the Lord.

"Giants" of today are problems, difficulties, obstacles, opposition and adverse circumstances—often seeming indomitable. They stick their big ugly heads in our faces and try to make us back down in fear and defeat. They want us to murmur, complain, rebel and disobey the Lord, rendering us ineffective.

In contrast, God has a plan and purpose for each of our lives that He desires us to accomplish through faith and trust in Him. He has:

- Challenges He wants us to face.
- Valleys He wants us to go through.
- Mountains He wants us to climb.
- Obstacles He wants us to overcome.
- Giants He wants us to defeat.
- Exploits He wants us to accomplish.
- Battles He wants us to win.
- Victories He wants us to gain.

He wants to do the *impossible* through our lives just as He did in Bible days. However, what are the criteria for this to happen?

Seek the Lord's Will

The first prerequisite is that we seek His will not our own. People say they want God's will— but do they really? Are they willing to invest the time and energy to discover it? Are they willing to pay the price to follow it?

The majority of Israelites in Numbers 13 and 14 only wanted God's will for their lives when it was convenient. When it was inconvenient, like having to fight powerful people who lived in large fortified cities, they wanted their will, which in this situation was to replace Moses and Aaron as their leaders and go back to Egypt (Numbers 14:1-4). The people of the community wept and grumbled because they were afraid and not willing to believe and obey God's clear directive. In contrast, Moses and Aaron humbly fell on their faces in front of the whole Israelite assembly (Numbers 14:5) seeking the Lord's guidance and help and entreating the people not to rebel.

Disobeying the Lord brings about both judgment and lost opportunities. Murmuring Israelites, discouraged from entering the Promised Land by the negative report of the ten faithless spies, would wander forty years in the wilderness—one year for each of the forty days they explored the land—until the whole generation of fighting men, twenty years old or more, had perished (Numbers 14:29, 34).

The 10 spies whose negative report caused the people to rebel faced immediate judgment:

> So the men Moses had sent to explore the land, who returned and made the whole community grumble against him by spreading a bad report about it—these men who were responsible for spreading the bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the LORD. Of the men

who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived (Numbers 14:36-38).

WANDERING IN JFK

On the return trip from a Holy Land Adventure, my team and I arrived late for our domestic flight from New York to Pittsburgh. We shuffled back and forth from terminal to terminal at JFK Airport for one day, trying to get a flight home because each airline said the other one was responsible for our dilemma. Feeling like refugees, we learned two valuable lessons: First, it revealed to those interested in going on a future "Around The World Outreach" with me some of the challenges that can happen on an extensive mission trip. Second, we learned it's not very appealing to wander aimlessly for even one day—how much harder to wander in a wilderness for 40 years!

Lois McBurney, one of the travelers, wrote the following poem entitled "The Maranatha Pilgrims" about a portion of our group who were stranded at the airport in New York:

The Maranatha pilgrims numbering nine plus one,
Thought their travels were over, but in fact another'd begun.
These ten weary travelers were not a pretty sight,
Having flown for twelve plus hours, all through the night.
They walked quickly, for their schedule was tight,
Yet they missed Jet Blue—their connecting back-home flight.
What a way to start the day—finding their way through JFK!
How many terminals must there be? Should they be in 5 or 4 or 3?
How should they get there? Where should they go?
While all the time keeping their luggage in tow.
Up and down the escalator, in and out of the train.
How much longer could they last? They endured increasing pain.
It seemed that the airport they would long occupy,
Till three fortunate souls got to fly home standby.
The remaining seven pilgrims, both hungry and stressed,
Were shuttled to a hotel, where they got much needed rest.

They rose up early, praying for a better day,
As they wended their way back to JFK.
Once more through security; but the travelers didn't frown,
Till they learned that two were left behind due to a checkpoint shutdown.
After getting the all clear sign,
They were reunited and got in line.
All of their prayers were not in vain,
Since there were just enough seats for seven more people on that plane!
So if you have troubles—and all of us do,
Remember to talk to God, He'll take care of you.

BLESSINGS ARE RESERVED FOR THE FAITHFUL

God reserves His empowerment and blessings for those like Joshua and Caleb, the two faithful spies who wholeheartedly followed the Lord:

> Because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows Me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it (Numbers 14:24).

> Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him (Numbers 27:18); he will lead Israel to inherit it (Deuteronomy 1:38).

Then following the forty years of wilderness wandering, the Lord spoke the following words to Joshua shortly before he led the Israelites in the conquest of the Promised Land:

> Be careful to obey all the law My servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful (Joshua 1:7-8).

One of the many scriptural examples of seeking God's will is David; one of his greatest attributes was the practice of inquiring of the Lord as in 2 Samuel 5:17-19:

> When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, they went up in full force to search for him, but David heard about it and went down to the stronghold. Now the Philistines had come and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim; so David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will You hand them over to me?" The LORD answered him, "Go, for I will surely hand the Philistines over to you."

Because of his dependence upon the Lord for help and direction, David won many amazing battles and established a great kingdom. Likewise, believers today who want to walk in victory must diligently search and obey God's Word. Rather than seek our own will, trying to manipulate or coerce God to do what we want, we must obey *His* will. If we neglect this foundational principle, everything we try to accomplish for the Lord will be futile. This is why every January I fast for a week or more—I want my will to be broken and His will to prevail! Ask yourself, "Am I willing to fit into *God's* plan, or do I want God to fit into *my* plan? Is it His will I am seeking to fulfill, or is it really my own?"

When I am praying for something, I tell people, "If it is not God's will, I do not want it. If it is His will and I am being obedient, then nothing can stop me from receiving it. So I have nothing to fear or worry about." It is my will to do His will.

A DIVINE APPOINTMENT

Back in October of 2002, a national ministry was facing a major crossroad and transition. They were in the process of restructuring their ministry but facing some internal conflicts and uncertainties about their future direction. Their Director of Evangelism had been told by the pastor of the church he attended that the Bill Rudge Ministries had grown greatly because of some careful restructuring.

After hearing me speak at his church in California, he asked to meet with me at his ministry's headquarters.

During our meeting, the Director of Evangelism asked for insight and advice about fasting and praying to know God's will; how I developed a unified board and staff; the ways in which I maximize funds and outreach, and my methods of always striving for excellence. After our talk, he said, "This was a divine appointment. God truly sent you because this is exactly what our ministry needs!"

Before leaving, I reiterated that it was after much fasting and prayer that the Lord made His direction clear to me about selling my former center and restructuring the ministry for even greater effectiveness. I strongly recommended to this evangelism director that he encourage every board member and ministry leader to fast and pray to seek the Lord's will and His direction—not their own. He received with excitement multiple copies of my book and audio message, *Fasting for Sensitivity and Power*, as well as other books and audio tapes our ministry had produced. Several months later, he informed me that the board and staff were fasting and praying for God's leading and His will for their ministry.

Within a year, the ministry grew considerably. What the Lord accomplished through those board members and ministry leaders resulted in tremendous growth and the expansion of an excellent ministry, touching countless lives for Christ across the globe with a powerful biblical message. Only the Lord knows my part in their new direction and tremendous growth, but I rejoice that they implemented the biblical principles by which I seek to live my life and structure my ministry. To God be the glory!

When you are facing a major decision or crisis, I encourage you to fast, pray and study Scripture to discover divine direction and have God's peace in the midst of life's choices and challenges.

FINDING GOD'S DIRECTION

One July, on a Canadian speaking tour in northern Quebec, my family and I went on a whale watching trip from a village named

Tadoussac. On land the temperature was in the 70s, but out in the North Atlantic it was in the 40s and very foggy.

The crew on the boat remained totally silent, cupping their hands over both ears to listen for whales. When someone thought they heard or spotted one, they would yell out the direction.

Then the captain would start the engine and go after it. For two hours, we chased whales all over the ocean, but most of the time we did not find any. So we would wait until they thought they spotted another, and then go in that direction.

This is the way many Christians seek the Lord's will. They feel they should do such and such so they run over there; or then someone tells them to do this or that, so they run over here. When that doesn't work out, God supposedly gives them a new direction, and they attempt something else. When the crew of that boat really did hear or spot a whale, it was incredible; we were able to get close enough to watch it swim and frolic in the ocean. Likewise, when you truly hear and obey God's voice, the result will be most rewarding and victorious.

Instead of chasing the imagined voice of God here or there, we must get on our knees and get into His Word so we will *know* His voice and the direction He has for our lives. Instead of determining what I want God's will to be (then hoping He blesses my decision), I seek the Lord with all my heart through prayer, fasting and reading Scripture. When I am certain of what He is leading me to do, I step out in faith and obedience. Until He does give clear direction, I walk by faith, seeking to apply the wisdom of biblical truth and principles. Just as the Israelites stayed right where they were encamped until the Lord led them to move (Numbers 9:18), I usually stay right where I am until the Lord leads otherwise.

WALKING BY FAITH, NOT BY SIGHT

When our ministry was still very young, my wife and I were living in an apartment. As the ministry continued to grow, we began looking for a house to move into so we could have our offices in the basement. Instead of opening just one door so we could

conveniently walk through it, God opened two doors simultaneously, forcing us to make a decision.

One of the houses was large and ideal for my objectives. The other house was much smaller and not as adequate. Many people said, "Bill, you are a child of the King. You tell God what you want, and He will give it to you." I replied, "There is something wrong with that. I am not God. I cannot foresee the future. In my limited foresight, I cannot determine which will ultimately be the best decision. I do not know God's total plan. I walk by faith, not by sight."

Then I said, "What I *am* going to do is this: instead of telling God what to do, I am going to get on my knees. I am going to pray and fast to find out what His will is. Then I will be obedient to where He leads. I will stand and proclaim His will, not my own." God spoke to my heart to move into the smaller house. In obedience, I did, but for months I wondered why. I said, "You know I trust You Lord, but that other house was so much nicer and much more adequate." He spoke to my heart, "Trust Me."

A few months later, we had 3.7 acres of prime land donated to us. The land, located behind the house we were renting, was appraised at $80,000 (back in 1981). Shortly thereafter, the Lord strongly led us to step out in faith and build a ministry center and parsonage on this property. He intervened in a mighty way, enabling us to overcome many "giants" and complete the building projects without paying any interest. Had I moved into the larger, more adequate house, I would have missed the tremendous blessing and victory God gave to us for obeying His will and not acting on our own.

Do not tell God what you want Him to do. Do not try to coerce or force God to do your will, but pray and fast and seek His will. Then stand in faith and persevere until He fulfills what He has led you to do.

FAITH—SLAYER OF "GIANTS"

When we decided to build a ministry center on our newly acquired land, a "giant" stepped into our path. According to the woman

issuing permits at the city, we could never build on this property because the land did not meet the necessary zoning requirements; it was zoned incorrectly for our intentions. She also pointed out that there was no roadway going back to our property which further complicated matters. Finally, she told us there was not enough frontage. Displaying blueprints of our land, she showed how we could not comply under these conditions. However, she said she would speak to her supervisor.

Naturally, I was discouraged. Not giving up, however, I fell on my face before the Lord as Moses did, and began to pray and fast, knowing that He was able to overcome any obstacle. Unbeknownst to me, there was an older woman in a nearby office who had heard our conversation. She listened to me on the radio every Sunday morning and said to the other woman, "I like that minister; you try to help him!"

The next day I called the woman who gave out the building permits. She informed me that they would accept the frontage, but we could only build our ministry center and have outside activities on the commercially zoned land. In addition, we would have to provide our own roadway to the facilities.

Shortly thereafter, a friend donated his services to survey the land. He informed us that one-third of our property was already zoned commercial—the exact area, in fact, where we wanted to build our ministry center. The other two-thirds, zoned residential, was ideal for building the parsonage. Later, we were granted permission to use not only the commercial area, but all of our property for recreational activities. As the surveyor set our boundaries, he also discovered that the rear delivery entrance to a department store next to our land had been built with a slight curve and was now partially on our property. This meant that we now owned a portion of this road, giving us an automatic right to use it. We were no longer required to construct our own road. Indeed the Lord had gone before us and prepared the land.

One Saturday, while the volunteers were working on the building, Gordon Urmson, our construction supervisor (donating his services) told me that we needed a crane to lift up the large roof trusses. I

had no idea what a roof truss was, let alone where or how to get a crane, so my wife, Karen, and I sought the Lord. The next Sunday a man stopped at the house after we came home from church. Introducing himself he said, "I am an ex-alcoholic and God has changed my life. I work for a construction company, and if you ever need a crane, I can get you one for free any Saturday." I told him, "Next Saturday at 9:00 a.m." That Saturday, the construction crew put up all the roof trusses for the ministry center.

We have seen countless miracles in our ministry! Many times people have said, "That's impossible. You can't accomplish it." And they were right. By myself, I could not. But an Almighty God intervened and altered what seemed impossible. He made it possible because we sought His will, not our own. We were walking in obedience to His Word, following the leading of His Spirit and seeking to glorify Him.

THE LORD PROVIDES AGAIN

On another occasion, we needed a new ministry van. In addition to motivating many people to donate funds, the Lord also impressed upon one man's heart, in the middle of the night, to donate an older house and two acres of land he no longer needed. Then we could sell it and use the proceeds toward purchase of a van which the owner of a dealership agreed to sell us at cost. Finally, still $2,000 short of the amount needed, a pastor's wife in New Jersey said the Lord spoke to her heart, and the church her husband pastored filled that gap. It had taken 16 months to raise the funds, but because we sought His will and persevered in faith, the Lord was faithful.

Several ministry vehicles have been provided throughout the years in similar ways. Patiently seeking Him for the right vehicle and then trusting Him to provide the funds has been an exciting venture of faith. Through the years, we have determined to trust the Lord to meet our needs without borrowing money that required payment of interest. Somehow—sometimes on the very last day or even in the last hour—the Lord has honored us by meeting every need.

There isn’t space to share all of the illustrations of God’s faithfulness and miraculous intervention in my life and ministry, but one of many lessons I have learned is this: do not try to determine what you want God’s will to be, and never attempt to manipulate Him into fulfilling *your* will. Instead, seek His will through Scripture and prayer, be sensitive to His Spirit, then walk in unwavering faith and obedience to Him. If you do this, you can be assured that it will ultimately end in victory and for His glory.

Eyes on the Lord

The LORD had told Moses He was giving the land of Canaan to the Israelites even before the spies explored the land (Numbers 13:1). The Israelites' fatal flaw was in allowing circumstances to remove their focus from their trust in the LORD and His promises. They believed the report of 10 *fearful* spies rather than the words of God, comparing themselves to the *fearsome* giants instead of trusting Almighty God. Thus, unbelief fueled fear, complaint and rebellion. In contrast, Joshua and Caleb, two of the 12 spies, kept their focus on the LORD. They tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly:

> The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the LORD is pleased with us, He will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them (Numbers 14:7-9).

NOT AS IT SEEMS

Sometimes life's problems and circumstances seem bigger than they really are. For example, many years ago Karen and I were in Houston, Texas, heading west on I-10 toward San Antonio to visit the Alamo. We heard police cars with sirens blaring and lights flashing gaining on our position in the multiple lane highway. A dozen law enforcement vehicles blew by us on both sides, speeding down the highway. A couple minutes later, about ten more cruisers approached in formation behind us, quickly passing by. In the next

few minutes additional state troopers, county sheriffs and local police sped by.

We noticed helicopters in the sky above and ambulances and tow trucks whipping by in the same direction. By this time, we imagined either a multiple car pileup on the busy freeway, or some dreadful terrorist attack at a school or mall in the city ahead. Calling the ministry center, I asked if there were any terrorist attacks in the U.S. After checking the news, my son informed us that none had been reported.

Finally closer to the source of all the commotion, we found traffic at a standstill. I got out of my vehicle and asked someone what was going on: a high-speed chase had ended in a crash, so we expected front-page news the next day. We found in the *Houston Chronicle* only a tiny article of three little paragraphs on page 22, detailing that police had tried to stop a 39-year-old man in a utility truck with expired registration and inspection stickers. The man sped off and led police on a chase at speeds exceeding 100 mph through two counties and was stopped only when his truck ran over a "spike strip" set up on the interstate. This flattened the vehicle's tires and caused the driver to be ejected as it flipped over several times. The man was treated at a Houston hospital for broken ribs and internal bleeding. It turned out that he was also wanted for parole violations and warrants for other crimes. Now, a felony charge of evading arrest would be added to the list of charges!

More than 50 cruisers, several helicopters, ambulances and tow trucks were involved. I guess it is true that they really do everything BIG in Texas! The point is, sometimes life's problems and circumstances can seem bigger to us than what they really are.

GIANTS: REAL AND IMAGINED

Keeping focus on your problems and circumstances is like holding a small penny so close to your eye that it blots out everything else: flowers, trees, sun and horizon. When I see only my circumstances, I get discouraged. It's easy to complain and murmur when it seems there is so much opposition and so many obstacles. But when you

hold that penny back from your eye and get it in proper perspective, you realize that it is extremely small in comparison to your surroundings and the horizon. So too, when we keep our eyes on our problems, they loom very large in our sight, but when we keep our eyes on the Lord and His promises, we realize His power and faithfulness will enable us to overcome any "giant." What we fear is often not as ferocious as what we anticipate.

My wife and I were staying at an Army officer's house at the Presidio of Monterey in California where I had been ministering for various chapel services. During our free time, we enjoyed walking down the hill through the base to Monterey Bay. The officer and his wife who sponsored us, and with whom we were staying, told us that a mountain lion had been sighted recently on the property and warned us to be careful after dusk. They offered us the use of their vehicle but, preferring to walk, we declined their gracious offer.

One evening at dusk, Karen and I were walking back up the long steep hill to the captain's house. We came to a clearing by a wooded area when Karen screamed in terror, "Mountain lion!" She saw two eyes glaring at us in the dark. Quickly, I turned to survey the situation but laughed as I informed her it was only a house cat! A year later, returning to speak again at the Presidio, the captain, his wife, Karen, and I laughed whenever we saw a cat, remembering how startled and momentarily paralyzed with fear Karen had become.

Sometimes we face "giants" that are more figments of our imagination than the real thing, but they are just as paralyzing. When Karen saw glowing eyes in the dark, there was no doubt in her mind that we had come face to face with a ferocious mountain lion. Unlike the mountain lion episode, however, other "giants" we face are real. David fought against the real giant, Goliath, but kept his trust in the Lord. He proclaimed his faith in God as he spoke to Goliath:

> You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the

> LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and He will give all of you into our hands (1 Samuel 17:45-47).

LORD, I NEED YOUR HELP

Often, I am in circumstances in which there are no apparent solutions—options seem impossible or undesirable. At these times, I fall on my face or get on my knees or lay prostrate and cry out to the Lord. I look to the only One who can resolve the seemingly impossible situations or help me in overwhelming circumstances.

I have performed weddings in a variety of venues—from woods to castles. Each one has presented its own specific obstacles because of a unique circumstance or different venue.

However, one wedding had more challenges than most. A few days before the horrendous attacks of 9/11, I was to officiate the wedding of the daughter of a famous scientist in Long Island, New York. However, we had several obstacles to overcome first.

Karen and I arrived at the bride's house (where the rehearsal was being held) just one hour before it began and with no time to see the wedding site before the rehearsal. Heavy traffic had turned a 30-minute drive from the airport into an hour and a half journey, and I was unable to see the wedding location until the next day, only one hour before the wedding. The groom, whom I had never met until rehearsal, was from Germany (premarital counseling had been via mail and e-mail). Several people in the wedding party were from Germany and did not speak English, so there was also a language barrier to deal with during the rehearsal.

Because both the rehearsal and the wedding were outside, I had prayed and fasted for good weather and trusted the Lord for it. The weather was wonderful for both events. Following the rehearsal, the expected eight minute trip (from the bride's house to the hotel

where we were staying) took an hour and a half because our printed directions from the internet were wrong and it was hard to see street signs at night.

The ushers arrived late at the wedding due to taking photos, and some of the guests were asking me where to sit! This was an extremely complex wedding at a large mansion estate on Long Island. One hour before the wedding, the man in charge of the complex who was coordinating the wedding asked if I could alter some things (such as the procession from inside the mansion to outside, and so on) since they had never done a wedding before like this one. I informed the father of the bride, but he insisted we continue as planned, so I slipped into the men's restroom, got on my knees and said, "Lord, I need Your help." He reminded me of the many Teen Life events I coordinated which often involved hundreds of teens in potentially chaotic circumstances—assuring me that all would go well this time also. I hurried to the estate's wedding coordinator and told him it must be done as the bride planned and to rearrange what was needed to accommodate her wishes. Then I had to inform the person doing videotaping, the ushers and the musicians to make the necessary adjustments.

The musicians had a vocal microphone on a stand with a cord for me to use, but I knew it would not be adequate because of so much movement during the ceremony. Thank the Lord, at rehearsal I had requested a wireless lapel microphone; they were able to borrow one from their church, which worked great.

One of the bridesmaids fainted during the ceremony and had to be carried out. If there is ever a good time for such a thing to happen, that was it, as it occurred precisely as the reader began to read 1 Corinthians 13. I was able to evaluate the situation, quickly resolve it, and go on with the wedding.

The wedding went perfectly. We received numerous comments that it was the best wedding ceremony they had ever attended. The father of the bride said to me at the reception, "We have heard so many great comments; many things you said were profound." The wife of a Mexican dignitary who attended the wedding was so touched that she prayed with us and her husband in our hotel

parking lot to give her life to Christ. The newlywed couple wrote to tell us how wonderful the wedding was and that many lives were touched by the ceremony and message.

They, and so many others, will have many fond memories for years to come.

EYES ON HIM, NOT CIRCUMSTANCES

Psalm 121:1-2 encourages us:

> I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

After determining what I believe to be the definite direction of the Lord, I trust Him to fulfill what He has led me to do. I strive to keep my eyes on Him, not my circumstances. Then, when I am in the midst of adversity, I have the assurance that I am in His will, and that He will ultimately work the situation out to accomplish *His* purpose.

Circumstances Seem Contrary

The spies came back from the land of Canaan and reported to Moses and the Israelite community that the land *did* flow with milk and honey (Numbers 13:27); however, they did not expect that the people living there would be so strong and the cities so large and fortified (Numbers 13:28). The circumstances were contrary to what they had anticipated or hoped.

After footers were dug for the foundation of our ministry center, we had to wait three weeks to pour the cement: the footers filled with rainwater and none of the three pumps would work. The southside wall caved in twice—and sat for a couple of months. An easement pipe, needed so we could fill in a 200 yard ditch across our property, failed inspection three times. We were continually out of funds. We waited many months for a bricklayer. Our parking lot had to be dug up in the middle of winter due to an underground waterline leak. Problems persisted but we persevered.

The murmurers and complainers arose, saying, "Are you sure the Lord led you to do this? You will never finish it!" But we did! God fulfilled what He had led us to do. We dared to trust Him to overcome what seemed to be insurmountable obstacles, and He was faithful!

A few years after completing that first building project, Mike Dunder told me that he wanted to donate his services to build an addition to the ministry center. Mike was the very man who, while we were working on our first building, came by and said, "Something keeps telling me to come back and help." Having assisted on the first building, God now gave him the vision to head up the construction of this new, large addition.

I began to seek the Lord to be certain He was leading us to do so, and to have the assurance He would meet all the needs. Two months later, after much prayer and fasting, I was sure the Lord wanted us to step out in faith and begin. As soon as we did, everything began to go wrong! It looked like we would not get the necessary rezoning to build the addition. To make matters worse, our funds were so tight that it did not appear we could even cover ministry expenses, let alone complete an extensive building project. In addition, we were facing many other difficulties and challenges, and during this time my family was heading into one of the deepest, darkest valleys we have ever gone through (documented in my book *Strength through Weakness*).

WHAT I LEARNED FROM MOSES

It was a time of being assaulted by "giants!" I prayed, "Lord, I am being obedient to what You have led me to do. What is happening?" As I sought the Lord, He impressed upon my heart the account of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage. Where did God lead them? To the Red Sea.

They were caught between the uncrossable Red Sea and mountains, with Pharaoh's hordes sweeping from behind to annihilate them. Do you feel like that sometimes? There have been times when I *felt* God had forsaken me; I *felt* hopeless. I wondered, "What good can come of this?" I wanted to escape. But, you cannot see the impossible unless you are in an impossible situation. Be faithful to God, and if, in so doing, you end up surrounded by adverse circumstances, be at peace and know that He is in control. Trust the Lord to deliver you.

Moses did not get to the Red Sea by mistake. God purposely led Moses and Israel into that impossible situation so that He could be glorified through what He was about to do. God spoke to my heart through this account of Moses. In the same way, He allowed obstructions to come at us on all sides—making a large addition virtually impossible—so that when it was completed, He would be the One who was glorified.

In the midst of overwhelming obstacles, one "giant" after another fell. God's intervention and blessings prevailed. The local commissioners voted unanimously to rezone the land. Over 200 groups, churches, businesses and individuals donated funds, materials and labor. A little more than a year after stepping out in faith, and with virtually all volunteer labor, the Lord again made the impossible become reality. Because we sought Him and obeyed Him, He enabled us to build a ministry complex, valued at over half-a-million dollars (in the 1980s), without a penny of interest being paid. Many exciting illustrations, too numerous to mention here, reveal how God is the One who provided our ministry complex.

Joe Garcia said, "Every time I would get laid off I knew Bill was praying. Sure enough, that day or the next day, I would get a call that they needed my help on the building. The beautiful thing about it was that at the end of that year, after several layoffs and my going down to work on the ministry center, when we did our taxes I hadn't made any less than the year before."

SELLING THE CENTER

Ecclesiastes 3:1 says, "There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven." The ministry center, with all its accompanying miracles, was a great blessing for 19 years. The miraculous way the Lord provided it and what He did through it is never to be forgotten. But in January 1998, I began sensing a stirring in my heart to sell the ministry center and use the funds to expand the Gospel around the world. However, I knew that if I sold the ministry center, and the Lord did not want me to, I would lose the tremendous facility He gave us; yet if I kept it, when He led me to give it up, I would have made it into an idol, placing it above His will.

So I continued to pray and fast for 100 percent certainty. As I prayed and considered this difficult decision, a perplexing conundrum stretched out before me: How could we do it and where would we go? As I shared with Karen that the Lord was impressing on my heart to sell the ministry center I said, "The path before me

seems impossible, but somehow He will make the way possible and fulfill what He is leading me to do."

We loved the ministry property and facilities. We raised our children there. Most of the trees and bushes throughout the ministry property were planted by my father. He died shortly after helping us finish the new addition. A courtyard outside the front door of the addition was created by money donated in his memory. These ideal facilities blessed us for many years. Nevertheless, the Lord was leading me to sell and I was compelled to obey. Like the angel that stopped Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, I hoped the Lord would stop the selling of my dream once I proved that I would obey, and that someone would write me out a check for a million dollars toward the expansion of the ministry. But it was not to be.

On June 4, 1998, I shared with my family, board and staff what I knew the Lord was speaking to my heart. I also talked to several people who were instrumental in the building of the ministry center. Their response was that it was built for the Lord and that they had so much respect for my integrity and discernment that they were confident the right decision was being made.

THE WORLD BECOMES MY CONGREGATION

From the calls and letters we received from those hearing my messages and reading my books, we knew we had a message the body of Christ and the world at large desperately needed and for which they hungered. Because of increasing opportunities and requests, I needed to focus more time and energy on speaking, writing and producing radio broadcasts, and less on overseeing a large ministry complex.

The Lord had called me to proclaim His Gospel to people throughout the world who were my "congregation." Although some people wanted to limit me to local ministry, I knew I must not be restrained or diverted by "trying to win the approval of men" (Galatians 1:10), but obey the Lord's vision for my life and ministry. Even before the ministry center was sold and additional funds were available, we moved ahead by continuing to expand our radio

broadcasts and speaking engagements, went on several missionary outreaches, printed new books and pamphlets, produced more audio messages and filled requests from around the world for thousands of our books and messages.

It was either keep the facilities and limit growth or sell the facilities and greatly increase ministry outreach. Savings from reduced expenses for utilities and maintenance would help our growing international ministry maximize both outreach and funds. After much prayer and fasting, I was convinced this building could be a blessing twice. First, it blessed us for 19 years by providing the means for fulfilling the vision the Lord had given us so far. Then the sale of it would bless the ministry again by supplying needed funds to take advantage of opportunities that 23 years of faithful ministry had opened to us, providing the potential to touch millions of lives for Christ.

Carolyn Mild, a longtime board member, stated, "All of us who have invested sacrificially of our time, money and talents into this ministry will now see God multiply our efforts to have an impact on countless lives throughout the world." With the unanimous support of the Board of Directors, we put the ministry center up for sale.

THE VALLEY BEFORE THE VICTORY

Little did I know that selling the ministry center and relocating would result in facing almost as many "giants" leaving the land as entering it. While the overall response to the sale of the ministry center was favorable—mixed emotions of sadness that it was being sold, but excitement about the potential for increased growth—we lost some local support. Real estate agents were upset with each other over contract disputes. A neighboring business owner was irate that we would not sign an easement binding on the future buyer. An accountant and attorney for a nearby nursing home pressured us to sell the entire property (including ministry center and parsonage) for an extremely low price and under unreasonable conditions. Still others believed rumors that we were selling the building, pocketing

the money and moving to California. Many other obstacles lay ahead.

During this difficult time, I walked away from almost $1,000 a month in support (a large portion of our income at that time) because of biblical convictions. Then, unexpectedly, in August 1998, we received a check for $40,000 from the estate of a man I did not know, but who had heard me speak. The ministry used it to supplement the support we had lost and help the ministry continue to expand. By July 1999, funds were depleted and the ministry center was still unsold. Then, in August 1999, we received another unexpected check for $49,025.78 in the final settlement of this same man's estate (and the first time anyone had left the ministry money in a will). This, along with other special gifts from faithful supporters, kept the ministry going and growing. As the ministry center sat, unsold, we learned that God's timing and ways are not always when or how we expect. However, day after day, with the building unsold, I would pray (often while fasting). The Lord would speak to my heart: "Trust Me. Persevere. I will be faithful."

We needed time to consolidate the equipment and supplies that were in the large ministry center in preparation for a quick and efficient move into a new facility (whatever, wherever and whenever that would be). I began to sell office furniture and equipment (including a beloved Nissan Professional Gymnastics Trampoline that had been gifted to us for only $100 from an area school). The delay in selling the building resulted in many people seeing our resolve to obey God's will in spite of great difficulties and obstructive circumstances.

My sister bought me a T-shirt that was most appropriate for my situation at the time. On the front in bold letters were the words:

WAIT TRAINING

The Ultimate in Strength Training

Those who wait on the LORD shall renew their strength. Isaiah 40:31

MOVING FORWARD

After two years of silence and waiting, and many days of fasting and prayer, speculating on where we would move once the ministry center *was* sold, on Sunday, July 16, 2000, the Lord clearly spoke to my heart. Like an unexpected streak of lightning across a clear blue sky I *knew* what to do: subdivide the property, sell the ministry center itself and renovate and expand the parsonage for both ministry and living purposes.

Knowing God's faithfulness in the past, the Board unanimously approved our stepping out in faith to begin construction despite challenging circumstances. The former ministry center was unsold. We were barely meeting monthly expenses—let alone starting extensive renovation and addition projects. Yet requests for free copies of our books and audio messages from missionaries, pastors, chaplains, military personnel, prisoners and individuals across the U.S. and around the world continued to increase. Fulfilling all requests, we placed an order for 5,000 copies of my newest book, *Faith Through the Fire,* at a cost of $4,000.

Before selling the ministry center, we needed the subdivision of our land approved by the commissioners, then we would have to separate and redo the underground electric and phone lines leading from the parsonage to the ministry building—about 100 yards away. We also needed to design and complete extensive renovations and expansion of the parsonage for both living space and ministry operations. Just to complicate things a bit, a teenage friend of my son drove his car through a section of our house.

Finally, excavation of the new ministry center site began September 18, 2000, by John Rust. Then Randy Carnino, Gordon Urmson and their helpers focused on the west side of the parsonage by converting the garage into offices, constructing an annex, building a large fitness room and a new garage. Mike and Rick Dunder got their building permit on October 2, 2000, and began construction on the east end of the parsonage. They headed up a team that added on several large rooms for living accommodations—necessary, because much of the former parsonage was being

converted into offices and media center—plus a Great Room for training and events. Mike also headed up a third team, renovating the existing parsonage interior.

The Lord usually gives me a biblical parallel for each construction project. The previous one seemed best illustrated by the account of Moses at the Red Sea with the hordes of Pharaoh approaching to annihilate the Israelites. The new building projects seemed exemplified in the story of the Assyrian invasion of Judah and the call for King Hezekiah to surrender Jerusalem (Isaiah 36-37). Stepping out in faith with three simultaneous construction projects, with virtually no money and a still unsold building seemed daunting. Yet, just as the Lord struck down 185,000 Assyrians and delivered Israel, we trusted Him to meet every need and overcome every obstacle because we were not being presumptuous, but rather obeying His lead.

The day construction officially started I told my youngest brother Frank, "If there is not a God and He did not speak to me, then I have no hope of finishing these construction projects. It seems as if I jumped off a 100-foot cliff and will not survive unless God saves me. Only the Lord can intervene and fulfill what He has led me to do. If I am still standing in four months and these projects are completed, then be assured that there has to be a God because only He could have accomplished it!"

Every day we made it through, I thanked the Lord for His mercy and provision for yet another day.

FACING OUR "GIANTS"

To get a feel for the conundrum we were facing, the three-pronged construction project was challenging and the most difficult we had ever undertaken for several reasons:

- We would not have the funds available to do construction projects for a new ministry center, additional living space and the renovation of the original parsonage until the building

was sold, but if we *waited* until the building was sold, we would have no place to go when it *was* sold.

- We had only four months (September 2000–January 2001) to obtain funds and complete these construction projects. By contrast, work on the first ministry center and the addition each required one year. People were more motivated to give because they were excited about larger facilities. Now, though our outreach would be greatly expanded, many people were not happy we were selling the ministry center, downsizing facilities and asking many of our staff and volunteers to work from their home offices.
- How do I raise $175,000 in four months to cover building expenses when our monthly income has been barely meeting general ministry expenses, and our ministry's total annual income was only about $100,000?
- We had planned to use funds from the sale of the ministry center to cover expenses for the construction projects but it sat unsold for two and a half years.
- The previous building projects could be stopped if we ran out of money, but this one could not because we were living in it and had to finish in order to function.
- On our other building projects, we only had to pay for materials since most of the labor was donated. However, on this project we also had to pay for much of the labor because many of our crew were not working in the local factories anymore (due to shut downs) and were now full time contractors.
- Three construction projects with three different teams worked simultaneously while we continued to operate a growing ministry and tried to maintain normalcy in our home.
- All three construction projects had to dovetail together so they could finish them about the same time in order that we could focus our time and energy on a growing ministry.

- I felt the constant weight on my shoulders of financial needs, deadlines and decisions. I felt like I was running a race: trying to stay ahead of a tidal wave of bills; trying to keep them paid by donations; borrowing money interest-free from my retirement accounts and by selling personal and ministry furniture and equipment. The Lord spoke to my heart not to call businesses and individuals for financial support, but to share our needs only in the monthly newsletter.

CONSTRUCTION "GIANTS"

- About the same time the first major construction bill of $22,635.45 was due, my personal CD for $25,000 from a car accident matured so I was not penalized six months interest for withdrawing the money to lend to the ministry.
- I stopped taking my paychecks in November 2000 and did not resume them until the end of January 2001. Depleting all of my available retirement money, I had nothing else to lend the ministry.
- We received a bill for $27,390.25 from the lumber company that was supposed to be interest-free for four months, but after only one month, they called because they, too, were hurting for money. Somehow, God enabled us to pay it.
- The city of Hermitage had not yet approved the subdivision of the property with several needed variances when we began construction. However, on October 2, 2000, the Hermitage Planning Commission unanimously approved it, and later that month (October 25, 2000), the Hermitage Commissioners unanimously approved the subdivision of our property.
- We were told the sewer tap could cost $1,200, but the person in charge of Building Inspection and Code Enforcement helped locate it at no charge.
- We were living in the midst of the construction project. Workers were continually inside and outside our home and

we had little privacy. Where will my wife, mother, niece and our dog Hosanna stay while they renovate the inside of our house?

- Almost every room in the house had interior and exterior walls, doors and windows taken out, as well as holes knocked in exterior walls, leaving debris, sawdust and drywall dust on everything. Karen and I were living in the middle of it with plastic sheeting over our bed and our clothes stored in plastic totes until I sent her to California to stay with our daughter's family.
- Hosanna and workers were constantly tracking in mud. Hosanna was constantly bothering workers and was being let out of the house by them, so during the daytime I had to keep her in the gym at the ministry center.
- I prayed and fasted many times for good weather during crucial construction projects, safety of the workers, decisions on construction projects and finances to pay impending bills.
- It could have been cold and wet while doing the framing and getting under roof because temperatures in October are usually 40–60 degrees, but almost every day it was in the 70s and usually sunny except for a few days of rain. It did not get cold until November when the building was finally closed in.

"GIANTS" OF DISCOURAGEMENT

- Answering comments such as: "Why are you adding on when you have such a large building already?"
- The power line from the parsonage to the ministry center was hit while digging footers so electric and heat in the ministry center was out for one week in October.
- The new underground power line and phone line to building cost approximately $5,000.
- My neck, back, shoulders, elbows, knees and left ankle were hurting from raking stones for cement floors, busting up

cement sidewalks, carrying railroad ties and so on.

- Shingles blew off the new roof during a 70 mph windstorm.
- Even conserving heat by keeping thermostats lowered was difficult because seven furnaces were required in November and December—four gas furnaces at the ministry building and three electric furnaces at the house—and natural gas prices tripled. (November and December were two of the coldest months on record for our area.)
- In December, when a transformer blew out from overload, having no heat could have damaged water pipes, computers and media equipment, but thank the Lord it did not.
- With so many windows and doors boarded up and workers in and out, Hosanna and I lived in 55 degrees. Debris was everywhere from November to January.
- I was constantly cold (slept with four blankets), lonely, tired, dirty, hungry and woke up with eyes red and swollen and phlegm from all the construction debris floating in the air.
- There was no kitchen for almost two months; we kept our food at the ministry center.
- No furniture could be moved into the parsonage until January 12, 2001.

ENCOURAGING OTHERS BY OUR FAITH WALK

Although there were times of concern and constant stress (as Moses and others of the faith had, too), I had an overall peace that the Lord was with me and would bring ultimate victory—I just was not sure when or how. Each step of the way, and for every important decision, I would get on my knees and ask the Lord for wisdom and say, "Let Your will prevail."

Many times situations seemed hopeless and overwhelming (sometimes my chest hurt) but as soon as I strengthened myself in the Lord, I would have immediate peace. I strengthened myself in the Lord by reflecting on all He had done in the past in my life and ministry and with such scriptures as Philippians 4:13: "I can do all

things through Him who strengthens me" and Philippians 4:19 (NASB): "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

Many people were encouraged in their own walk with the Lord because, despite the circumstances, I testified about my confidence in the Lord's faithfulness. One Marine Corps fighter pilot heard this testimony and was encouraged to step out in faith and obedience regarding an issue the Lord had been dealing with him about.

In September of 2000 at Horizon Bible Institute in California, as I testified about the Lord's faithful provision in the past and my confidence that He would meet the remaining needs of this current faith venture, the students and professors were greatly encouraged. They knew at the same time, that unless the Lord intervened, I was doomed to fail. In June of 2002, I was asked to speak there again and could share how the Lord fulfilled everything He called us to do and they were greatly encouraged once again.

Many years after he first volunteered his time to help us build, Mike Dunder said, "The only miracles I have seen in my life are what God did through your ministry when we were building those ministry centers. Every time we faced a dark and hopeless situation, you went into fasting and prayer, and somehow, God always came through!"

CREATING AN OASIS

When we put the ministry center up for sale in July 1998, Karen and I made a covenant with the Lord not to watch television in our house until the building was sold. I felt that I was in a war and needed to keep my life, home and ministry pure. I wanted nothing to hinder what God was doing or to neutralize me, rob my peace, weaken my faith or disqualify me (as happened to Moses when he hit the rock out of anger and frustration) from receiving God's blessing and fulfillment. Along with fasting many times, I was on a perpetual "fast" from television in our home.

My wife and I also agreed that after the ministry center was sold, we would not watch television in our home—only during

emergencies or watching wholesome videos—so as to make our home an oasis. Instead, she watches inspirational Christian movies. The peace and presence of the Lord and the additional time to study His Word and pray are some things we never want to forfeit.

VISION BECOMES REALITY—THE BUILDING SELLS

Several individuals and organizations had wanted to buy the Bill Rudge Ministries' center. But they were never able to obtain the funds. It was as if the Lord led us to sell, then blocked the sale of it! We would later learn the many benefits from that delay.

In November 2000, I wrote our January 2001 newsletter (by faith) explaining why we were selling the ministry center. We mailed it at the beginning of January with no buyer, yet within a week of mailing —and after two and a half years of it being unsold—it was sold! That very day (January 10, 2001) I was fasting and praying, "Lord, bring the buyer You want," Pete, of the Mercer County Area Agency on Aging (MCAAA) came by. Two days later (January 12, 2001), on the very day we began moving items into our new facilities—just like the Jordan River parted as the priests carrying the Ark stepped into it—Paul, Board President of MCAAA, informed me they wanted to buy the building. That day Paul and I verbally agreed to the deal with a handshake.

MCAAA put $25,000 down on January 26, 2001. Their payment of $150,000 in February enabled us to pay most of the remaining construction/ renovation bills and help with other ministry expenses. They also bought additional land behind the building for $15,000 which we received in April 2001 and which helped with the landscaping of our new facilities. Their remaining interest-free payments (offered because we have been so blessed by never having to pay interest) would greatly help with ministry growth and outreaches.

Alice, one of the real estate agents who had previously attempted to sell the building wrote: "We are so happy and excited for you and the ministry. My husband and I prayed this past year for you to be blessed and for God's promises and timing to come to you. We

watched you 'stand' speaking of the 'greatness' of our God and how He is ever faithful to you. Thank you for the opportunity you gave, but we both felt 'God and you' would do it without any help and it has happened. God bless you and prosper you in His kingdom." A devotional concerning God faithfully fulfilling His promise to Joseph after many years was also included in with her letter.

The Lord fulfilled what He had led me to do and the building projects were completed debt-free. God allowed us to face many seemingly hopeless situations so everyone would know that He—not us—accomplished it! Accounts of God's miraculous interventions and His faithfulness could go on and on. He enabled us to overcome numerous "insurmountable" obstacles and gave us creative ways to fund the construction/renovation projects. God's timing is always perfect.

It took two and a half years (June 1998–January 2001) to sell the building and complete our new construction/renovation projects. What looked impossible when we started became a reality as we trusted the Lord and persevered. We crossed the "Red Sea" and entered the "Promised Land" of tremendous ministry growth. A new ministry center was created which lowered overhead costs immensely and increased the outreach capability of a ministry geared towards maximizing time, finances and effectiveness to reach the world for Christ. Offices, additions and changes made our once modest house into an efficient work center, capable of handling the increased growth of the ministry.

ARE YOU WILLING?

As we endured one obstacle after another during the transition time of selling the former ministry center and building a new one, and seemed to suffer one defeat after another with no hope of victory in sight, I asked, "Why, Lord, are You allowing me to be humiliated? This is completely opposite to what You had promised." I felt like Job:

> I have become a laughingstock to my friends, though I called on God and He answered—a mere laughingstock, though righteous and blameless! (Job 12:4).

The Lord spoke to my heart: "Are you willing to be humiliated that I may be glorified?" His Spirit impressed on my heart to review the heroes of the faith recorded in Scripture—they all suffered apparent humiliation before He greatly used them and fulfilled His promise to them. I said, "Yes, Lord, I am willing to be humiliated for You to be glorified." After many months of apparent defeat and humiliation, He intervened, fulfilled His promise and brought about a great victory.

I later realized that a greater impact was made on people's lives through what felt like humiliating times than if I had been given merely easy victories. Many people commented concerning my attitude of faith, trust and peace and how they were encouraged during their difficulties and times of struggle because of it. In the storm, the light of the Lord shone all the brighter, contrasting the darkness of our circumstances.

GOD'S INTERVENTION AND PROTECTION

During my lifetime, I have faced numerous dangerous and hopeless circumstances, but God has intervened to make the seemingly impossible, possible! Three of my journals (*Taming of Godzilla, The Impossible,* and *Adventures in Missions*) document hundreds of miraculous accounts of God's amazing intervention, protection and provision.

As a youth, a vicious German Shepherd dog attacked me while I was riding a bike. I was nearly killed jumping onto a moving train and almost drowned after jumping off a train trestle. While hitchhiking out West, I nearly froze to death in New Mexico. Shortly thereafter, as a new Christian, I was almost blinded when a car battery exploded in my face. Years later, I was just about shot at a cult complex in West Virginia and almost killed three different times in Colorado. I was bitten by a brown recluse spider and twice swarmed by yellow jackets.

With no money or facilities, my wife and I started what was to become an international outreach ministry. Stepping out in total faith and obedience, the Lord enabled us to build ministry centers valued at over a million dollars without paying any interest. During the 10 years we sponsored outdoor outreaches for Teen Life and Kids Life, God kept us from ever being rained out—sometimes through amazing weather events. The Lord has accomplished 100 percent of what He has led me to do.

Many times, mission opportunities the Lord led me to undertake seemed impossible to carry out. Airline strikes, rioting, protests, coup attempts, rockets being fired, threats of invasion, extreme weather conditions, epidemics, near-tragic accidents, dangers and unplanned circumstances stood in the way. But God faithfully intervened to make the way and provide protection in every situation.

I have been threatened, attacked, put on "hit lists," had spells put on me, heard prophesies for my destruction, caught in situations of extreme danger, surrounded by hostile people, terrorized in an Arab country, and stranded in Haiti, India and Nigeria. God protected me, our interpreter and the witch doctor I led to Christ from being murdered by three angry men armed with machetes and a lead pipe. I was the target of a failed robbery attempt in Lagos, Nigeria; caught up in a riot in Greece; and smuggled in and out of a country where it was forbidden to share the Gospel under penalty of prison or death.

My son and I were almost run over and killed by a bus in the Himalayas. On another occasion, I, and those traveling with me in the Himalayan Mountains, nearly went over the edge in a Jeep. Following a speaking engagement in Jerusalem, I stood in the exact spot where 23 hours later the first female suicide bomber detonated herself. I was escorted across Egypt by armed guards in a caravan of armed vehicles due to the high risk of terrorism. Over the years, I was in several Middle East countries during threatened attacks against U.S. citizens. My wife and I faced great peril in the California wildfires. My family survived a violent four-vehicle collision in Oregon which totaled the station wagon we were riding in following a

speaking engagement in British Columbia. I personally survived several bad vehicle accidents.

These aforementioned examples of seemingly impossible, extremely dangerous and life-threatening circumstances are not all I have faced, merely highlights of just a few. There is no doubt that the God of the Bible intervened, protected, delivered and brought ultimate victory through them all! All serve to validate the reality and faithfulness of the Lord whom I wholeheartedly seek to serve and glorify in every aspect of my life—physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Yes, He has honored and blessed my ministry and family in ways too numerous to mention. ("Those who honor Me I will honor"— 1 Samuel 2:30). As the Apostle Paul said in Romans 15:17-18 (NASB): "Therefore in Christ Jesus I have found reason for boasting in things pertaining to God. For I will not presume to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me."

THE PATTERN

The pattern I see in Scripture is what I have repeatedly witnessed in my life and ministry. The Lord leads me to do something, or I spend time seeking Him until His leading is clear. Then I step out in faith and obedience, and most of the time just about everything imaginable goes wrong. The task seems impossible and defeat seems imminent. Then the Lord intervenes in His time and in His way. He is faithful to bring ultimate victory. He has done this countless times.

"HARD PRESSED ON EVERY SIDE, BUT NOT CRUSHED"

The Apostle Paul was beaten, stoned, imprisoned and shipwrecked. He experienced hunger, thirst and cold; his life often in danger of death (2 Corinthians 11:23-33), but the results were victorious and his life was not taken until God's purpose was fulfilled.

Second Corinthians 4:8-10:

> We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed;
> perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned;

> struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

Psalm 44 is intriguing. It begins with the psalmist recounting God's faithfulness and the victories He provided in the past:

> We have heard with our ears, O God; our fathers have told us what You did in their days, in days long ago. With Your hand You drove out the nations and planted our fathers; You crushed the peoples and made our fathers flourish. It was not by their sword that they won the land, nor did their arm bring them victory; it was Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your face, for You loved them. You are my King and my God, who decrees victories for Jacob. Through You we push back our enemies; through Your name we trample our foes. I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; but You give us victory over our enemies, You put our adversaries to shame. In God we make our boast all day long, and we will praise Your name forever (Psalm 44:1-8).

Then at verse 9 it completely changes. The psalmist is bewildered, because even though the people of God have not forsaken the Lord, it appears that God has abandoned them. Let's read the rest of this Psalm:

> But now You have rejected and humbled us; You no longer go out with our armies. You made us retreat before the enemy, and our adversaries have plundered us. You gave us up to be devoured like sheep and have scattered us among the nations. You sold Your people for a pittance, gaining nothing from their sale.
>
> You have made us a reproach to our neighbors, the scorn and derision of those around us. You have made us a byword among the nations; the peoples shake their heads at us. My disgrace is before me all day long, and my face is covered

> with shame at the taunts of those who reproach and revile me, because of the enemy, who is bent on revenge.
>
> All this happened to us, though we had not forgotten You or been false to Your covenant. Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from Your path. But You crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals and covered us over with deep darkness.
>
> If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, would not God have discovered it, since He knows the secrets of the heart? Yet for Your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.
>
> Awake, O Lord! Why do You sleep? Rouse Yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do You hide Your face and forget our misery and oppression? We are brought down to the dust; our bodies cling to the ground. Rise up and help us; redeem us because of Your unfailing love (Psalm 44:9-26).

NOT OUR WAYS

Has God forgotten us? Of course not. He has a broader perspective and purpose than our immediate circumstance and limited view.

The Apostle Paul, contemplating the suffering and adversity of the early Church, asks some relevant questions in Romans 8:31, 35:

> If God is for us, who can be against us? Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

In the context of the suffering believer, Paul continues in Romans 8:36 by quoting from Psalm 44:22:

> As it is written: "For Your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

Yet, Paul goes on to say in Romans 8:37-39:

> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Whether we are blessed or whether we suffer and face adversity, our faith in Christ enables us to be more than conquerors. In spite of frustration and the threat of defeat, we can be assured that God is faithfully working behind the scenes to fulfill His purpose.

After our car was totaled in that four-vehicle pile-up in Oregon, the Lord gave me Psalm 34:19 (NASB):

> Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

As David, in his old age, affirmed his oath to Bathsheba that Solomon their son would become king, he testified of God's faithfulness by confirming his promise with these words:

> As surely as the LORD lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble (1 Kings 1:29).

And 2 Timothy 3:10-12 affirms:

> You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

AFRAID?

Some people say to me, "Aren't you afraid when you travel, thinking about the car wrecks, train derailments, plane crashes, bombs, terrorists, hijackings, riots, threats of war, disease and the other dangers you have faced?" I answer, "No. The reason I go and risk my life is because I believe the safest place to be is in God's will." Before I go on any missionary outreach, I pray and fast for the Lord's direction. No matter what happens, I have the assurance that God has it all in control.

As Psalm 138:7 states:

> Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You preserve my life; You stretch out Your hand against the anger of my foes, with Your right hand You save me.

Indeed, it seems I often face hardships and difficulties, but the Lord has delivered me from them all and has brought the victory. The Lord has given me the assurance that my life will not be taken until His purpose is fulfilled. If His purpose for my life is fulfilled before He returns, then I can also trust Him to give me the grace to face death.

LOOK TO GOD

If Noah had gone by circumstances, he would have never built the ark. If Moses had gone by circumstances, he would have never crossed the Red Sea. If David had gone by circumstances, he would have never faced Goliath. If Elijah had gone by circumstances, he would not have taken on the prophets of Baal. If Daniel had gone by circumstances, he would have denied the Lord, and thereby escaped the lions' den. However, throughout God's Word, believers have refused to allow adverse circumstances and the enemy to back them down in fear and defeat. They stood in faith and trust, enabled by God to be victorious—some through great exploits; others by being faithful even unto death (Hebrews 11).

In molding and bringing His children to maturity and faith, God uses different circumstances for different people. For example, to temper and develop Joseph's character, God used terrible experiences: betrayed, thrown into a pit by his jealous brothers, then sold into slavery and wrongfully imprisoned. With Moses, God used 40 years in Egypt and 40 years in the wilderness to develop his leadership skills.

EVALUATION TIME

I tell someone going through times of discouragement or defeat that the first thing I do is to evaluate my walk with the Lord. Realizing that God honors those who honor Him, it is wise to first make certain there is no contributing sin or disobedience that is resulting in this defeat.

That *not* being the case, I would then seek the Lord to determine whether my involvement is cooperating with His will for my life. The commitment of my time and energy may be for a good cause, it may not be the purpose and priority He has for my life. The result? Frustration and wasted potential.

Perhaps you are in the midst of spiritual warfare and must stand strong in faith using the "full armor" of God. Or, it could be that God is using difficult circumstances to develop your character and mold and make you into what He wants and is using you as a testimony to others who are facing similar difficulties. If so, then...

PERSEVERE IN FAITH

God's work is accomplished by those who do not give up when obstacles and difficulties arise, but who endure the "pit" and "wilderness" experiences set before them. There is often one major difference between the person God uses and the one God doesn't use. While both may greatly desire to be used, the one who gives up easily when obstacles and difficulties arise never seems to be effectively used by God. In contrast, the one who endures and goes through the fire is the one God eventually, and greatly, uses for His glory.

Let me explain it another way. It's like the Lord saying, "I want you to follow Me." You look ahead and see a beautiful meadow. So you say, "Oh, Lord, I will follow You anywhere!" However, as you follow the Lord, the terrain changes. You didn't see that intervening deep, dark valley, a barren wilderness or a high, steep mountain. You may stop and exclaim, "Wait a minute, Lord. It is too hard. I didn't expect this. This is as far as I go!"

If only you would have continued through that deep, dark valley, or across that barren wilderness or up that steep mountain, you could have seen the other side; you would have come to lush, green grass, cool and crystal-clear water and the fulfillment of God's promise and blessing.

THE UPWARD WAY

Walking the path that leads to the fulfillment of God's promises requires faith and perseverance. Sometimes you must pass through dark woods, deep valleys, high mountains, barren deserts and isolated wildernesses before you achieve that ultimate victory.

A few years ago some of my family members and friends decided to "rough it" on a two-week journey through the western United States. All the inconveniences were worth it because of the breathtaking landscapes, incredible experiences, bountiful blessings and unique witnessing opportunities. This serves as a reminder to me that, although we face many challenges and difficult times, our journey is also interspersed with beauty and blessings. It is a picture of the hope that we will someday inherit all that God has prepared for us, making all suffering and difficulties in this life pale in comparison. As Paul the Apostle stated:

> I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:18 NKJV). For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Corinthians 4:17 NKJV).

PRESSING ON IN THE STORM

One Sunday evening a few years ago, Karen and I were returning to Pennsylvania from Michigan where we had delivered a carload of books to Christian Resources International. As we reached Toledo, a fast-moving thunderstorm overtook our vehicle and did not let up in the remaining four hours of the trip. Torrential rain, high winds, thunder and lightning made driving very difficult. In addition, visibility was impaired by darkness and fog. Commercial trucks on either side of our small Mitsubishi rental car splashed huge amounts of water on our windshield. As we traveled, the radio warned of tornadoes and flash flooding. Karen wanted to stop, but I felt it safer and best to drive on and chose to look at it as another adventure God was taking us through.

The decision to keep pressing on despite the weather and treacherous driving conditions can be compared to our Christian walk. Sometimes life throws us unexpected situations that can either stop us in our tracks or make us determined to press on towards the goal. Our choice to walk by faith and not by sight will strengthen our trust in the One Who watches over us and takes care of us.

Just as the Lord brought us home safely through the storm, He will bring you safely to your Heavenly home despite the difficulties and challenges this life holds for you. Jesus promises:

> These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation [trouble, pressure, affliction, difficulty], but take courage; I have overcome the world (John 16:33 NAS).

After I spoke at Petra Cafe in Fort Stewart, a young soldier said to me, "I want to go home, sir." We all get homesick at times and probably none more than those serving in the military.

Nevertheless, he had to fulfill his service to the US Army. Likewise, we must fulfill our commitment to serve Christ wherever He leads.

Cerita Dini, an Indonesian Christian, sums it up well:

> Life—like any journey—involves stops along the way. Sometimes there are detours, sometimes dead ends. And sometimes, beautiful and unexpected things happen God told me to follow Him. I haven't always known where He's taking me but I know I can trust Him to take me where I need to go.

Would you be among the believers who can't get past the obstacles and difficulties? Or will you hear, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant," and experience the joy and victory of those who persevere and remain faithful to the end?

MISSION TRIPS

Before taking people on a mission trip, I explain that Christ's commission to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth requires sacrifice, self-denial and following Him to places and into situations that will remove them from their comfort zone. They must expect the unexpected, be adaptable and flexible, not complain or murmur and not back down in fear or give up in defeat. Faith, attitude, discipline, commitment, courage and determination are crucial attributes.

I assure them that although they will face challenges, inconveniences and potential dangers, the Lord will be with them. They will have some great adventures and witness some amazing victories, and they will be blessed even more than those they go to help. Relationships with some of the people they meet will become as close as that of a brother or sister. They will touch the lives of many whom they will one day meet in Heaven because of their willingness to go and to give.

THE CHALLENGE OF NEPAL

Nepal was part of a 19-day trip that also included India, the Netherlands and Israel. It was a rigorous and challenging mission outreach. It included 13 flights, five nights with little sleep and more than 3,000 kilometers logged by Jeep and van to minister at a national convention in the Himalayas and remote churches rarely

visited by missionaries. Many parts of the roads were washed out or had recent landslide debris. Some places were so narrow only one vehicle could pass. A very dangerous mountain road from Rangpo to Siligiri on which bandits and gangs often stop and rob travelers had to be driven at night. We prayed the Lord would protect us—and He did.

Assisted by my son-in-law and nephew, we had the opportunity to minister for three days at a national convention in the remote Himalayan Mountains of northeast India where we spoke to over 1,000 people (former Hindus and Buddhists, as well as many pastors and evangelists).

During the trip, which included the convention and various churches in India and a messianic congregation and international pastors' conference in Israel, I spoke 17 times—each one a different and, by God's grace, powerful message.

Many conference-goers at the Himalayan convention sat under a canopy with holes in it while torrential rains from monsoons pounded down for two days. People were ankle-deep in mud and water while sitting on hard benches for hours taking notes. They slept three nights on a cold, concrete floor. Their desire to hear the word of God was amazing. Many of these people had to walk for three days to get to the convention. Some villages where we ministered were so remote in the interior regions of the Himalayan Mountains that there was virtually no contact with the outside world.

Several of my messages were prepared in the middle of the night in a small, dirty, bug-infested bathroom as I read my Bible by flashlight.

Sikkim, the seat of Lama Buddhism, is a province of India, which had been a separate country and was very hostile to the Gospel. Although a restricted area during my previous outreach in the Himalayas, this trip we were able to get a visa and enter. I spoke in Rangpo at a church where the congregation were all former Buddhists and Hindus. None were raised Christian. Before our arrival, the men had dug steps into the side of the mountain so we would not have to walk the long, circuitous route up to the church.

We also visited a Buddhist monastery and gave some pamphlets I had written to receptive monks.

My desire to take the Gospel into every country in the world was furthered when I was able to take literature into Nepal where attempts to convert others to Christianity is illegal and strictly forbidden. Distributing Christian literature could result in imprisonment or possibly execution, but I wanted to share the Gospel with at least one person in Nepal. I talked our guide, Dilip, into taking us to Nepal. Nepal is about 12 km from Bagdogra. At the Indian border, the guards told us that foreigners were not allowed to cross without a visa. We pleaded our case but they refused, saying the Nepali border guards would be upset if they let us go to the border without a visa. I asked if we could just go to the bridge and look while Dilip and a pastor from Bagdogra went to the Nepal side to see if they could get us a visa. (I am very persistent when I believe the Lord wants me to do something.)

Just when Dilip returned to tell me it was impossible for us to enter Nepal and we were about to leave, a young man—a new believer and who had heard me at the convention—just "happened" to see us. He had connections in Nepal since he was a former gang member and still hung out with them. When he understood my desire to enter, he told us to follow him across the bridge in bicycle rickshaws; he was able to smuggle us in. He talked to Nepali border officials. For a bribe, which he finally got down to 200 rupees ($5.00), we entered.

Climbing on a bus, we went about 14 km to Dhulabari which was the next city beyond the border city, concerned that if we were checked by police we may not be able to leave. I was able to witness and pass out some of my pamphlets. I handed the *Searching* pamphlet to a man on the bus, then gave *What Is a Christian?* and *Are We Living in the Last Days?* pamphlets to Nepalies (brothers and a sister) at a shop, who enthusiastically read them. After talking with this family and giving them the pamphlets, I felt it was time to get out of Nepal.

We jumped on the back of a large truck and rode back to the border. While riding on the truck my nephew, a large athletic man,

hollered at me. Looking up I saw his face was pale. He pointed to police who were waving the truck over. My heart seemed to stop but they were merely waving us through. When we got off the truck near the border, I told Rich and Clay that if they tried to stop me at the border, I was going to make a run for the bridge and they would have to shoot me in the back. However, the guard we bribed was still on duty and smiled at us as he nodded to let us go through. As we crossed the bridge on a bicycle rickshaw I said, "It seems strange, but I am actually going to feel safe in India!"

Later, in Israel, I spoke at Sar Shalom in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem to people from a diversity of backgrounds and lifestyles, including drug addiction, alcoholism, Judaism and New Ageism. That evening, I spoke at an international ministers' conference in a large upper room in Jerusalem to pastors and Christian leaders from all over the world (Israel, Canada, Chile, England, United States, Congo, Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Venezuela and the Philippines). It was as though we were in the time of the apostles on the day of Pentecost with so many people speaking different languages.

The many obstacles and "giants" we faced on this missionary trip seemed impossible to overcome but our God was faithful and conquered every one of them.

WATCH THE GAUGES… YOUR LIFE DEPENDS ON IT!

Several years ago, I received a special gift from my wife—an hour-long airplane flight in which I would pilot the plane. This was thrilling because I had never flown an airplane before. I climbed into a little Tomahawk plane and the instructor explained what to do, then informed me that it was time for me to fly it without his help!

I pulled the throttle down. We started down the runway and picked up speed. I pulled the steering wheel back and we began to lift off the runway. Once we were in the air he said, "You turn the steering wheel to the right to go right, and to the left to go left. Pull it back if you want to go up, and push it in if you want to go down."

That sounded easy enough, but it wasn't. I had to use my left hand to steer, because my right hand had to stay on the throttle.

Being right-handed, I pulled the steering wheel back too hard with my left hand, and we started flying straight up in the air. So I pushed it in, but again too hard, and we started to nosedive. I would turn too far left or right and we would go sideways. I was sweating and my heart was pounding, but the instructor would not help me.

Finally, getting comfortable with the controls, I started looking out the window to enjoy the scenery and determine where I was going, but I was totally disoriented. Before I knew it, I was flying sideways again and going in the wrong direction. The instructor taught me two important flying principles to enable me to keep going in the right direction and to keep us headed toward the ministry center to take aerial pictures. He said, "First, keep your eyes focused on the horizon. Second, watch your gauges and trust them no matter what you think or feel."

The Lord has taught me that keeping my eyes focused on the horizon is similar to keeping my eyes focused on Him. Watching and trusting the gauges is comparable to reading and obeying God's Word. When we do, we will always go in the right direction.

God's Time, God's Way

The Israelites had a much different plan in mind concerning when and how the conquest of the Promised Land would occur than what actually transpired. They backed down from entering the land when they were supposed to because they were afraid of the giants who were living there. Then, because of their unbelief and rebellion, God pronounced that all of them 20 years old or more who grumbled against Him, would wander 40 years in the wilderness until they perished.

Numbers 14:39-45 tells what happened next:

> When Moses reported this to all the Israelites, they mourned bitterly. Early the next morning they went up toward the high hill country. "We have sinned," they said. "We will go up to the place the LORD promised." But Moses said, "Why are you disobeying the LORD's command? This will not succeed! Do not go up, because the LORD is not with you. You will be defeated by your enemies, for the Amalekites and Canaanites will face you there. Because you have turned away from the LORD, He will not be with you and you will fall by the sword." Nevertheless, in their presumption they went up toward the high hill country, though neither Moses nor the ark of the LORD's covenant moved from the camp. Then the Amalekites and Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down and attacked them and beat them down all the way to Hormah.

First, the Israelites didn't want to do it God's way. Then they didn't want to do it in God's time. They discovered that in order to have His empowerment and blessing, the Lord requires His children to do it both in His time and in His way.

NO SHORTCUTS

People are impatient by nature and don't like to face adversity. We want what we want when we want it—usually right now! We don't like to wait and we don't like to be inconvenienced. So too, we want God to answer our prayers instantly and solve our problems immediately. When He doesn't, we think He has failed us. Many become discouraged because they have tried every available prayer formula but have not achieved the promised results. This is because there is no shortcut to spiritual maturity. To grow in Christ and be conformed to His likeness takes time.

God can, and sometimes does, work instantly and supernaturally, but He usually works over time. The following are examples of how God deals with His people over time.

- God told Noah to build an ark because there was going to be a flood. If Noah had looked only at his circumstances instead of trusting in the words of God, he would have given up in defeat. What he did took considerable faith: he built a large boat on dry land. He foretold a phenomenon that had never occurred before—rain. Always, "a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground" (Genesis 2:6 NKJV). He preached for 120 years and failed to win one convert. Yet, in God's time and in His way, His words were fulfilled.

> By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family (Hebrews 11:7).

The people of Noah's day may have laughed and sneered, but as Jesus said, "The flood came and destroyed them all" (Luke 17:27). 2 Peter 2:5 states:

> …He [God] did not spare the ancient world when He brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others.

- God promised Abraham a son, but after many years of delay, it appeared hopeless. Yet, Romans 4:18-21 victoriously states:

> Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised.

After 25 years of waiting on the Lord to fulfill His promise, and facing many difficult times—Abraham, the friend of God (James 2:23) was 100 years old and Sarah was 90 (Genesis 17:17; 21:5)—when their son Isaac was born.

- At the age of 17 (Genesis 37:2), Joseph had a dream that his brothers would bow down to him. His brothers threw him into a pit and sold him as a slave into Egypt. Then in Egypt, he was put in prison for honoring the LORD and spurning the affections of Potiphar's wife. Sometimes we are persecuted or face problems, not for doing what is wrong, but for doing what is right and seeking to live totally for the Lord. God never said it would be easy.

God allowed 13 years to pass while He prepared Joseph. Eventually—in God's time and in God's way—the dream He gave Joseph was fulfilled. Joseph became second-in-command under Pharaoh in Egypt at age 30 (Genesis 41:46). At age 37 (20 years after his dream and being sold as a slave), his brothers bowed before him (Genesis 42:6), fulfilling the dream and saving Israel from starvation. Two years later, he revealed his identity to his

brothers—and later to his elated father, Jacob, who had been told that Joseph died years earlier.

Joseph said to his astonished brothers:

> You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives (Genesis 50:20).

Psalm 105:17-19 says it this way:

> He sent a man before them—Joseph, sold as a slave. They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the LORD proved him true.

- For 80 years, God prepared Moses to deliver the Hebrews out of Egyptian bondage and give them His Law. Then the following 40 years were filled with difficulties as Moses led the wandering Israelites in the wilderness between Sinai and Canaan. However, God used him to mold a complaining, unbelieving and rebellious people into the nation of Israel. Moses died at age 120 after leading God's people from the slave labor camps of Egypt to the edge of the Promised Land. There are references to Moses in nearly every book in the Bible.
- Naomi's husband and two sons died in Moab. Her two daughters-in-law were left childless. Upon returning to her hometown of Bethlehem, she told the women there:

> > Don't call me Naomi, call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me (Ruth 1:20-21).

Little did Naomi know that she would know triumph through this tragedy. The Lord had a purpose and would eventually use Ruth, her

Moabite daughter-in-law, through marriage to Boaz, in the ancestry of King David and eventually the Messiah.

The book of Ruth 4:13-17 gives the account:

> So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth." Then Naomi took the child, laid him in her lap and cared for him. The women living there said, "Naomi has a son." And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David (Ruth 4:13-17).

- Year after year, Hannah was provoked by her rival Peninnah, because the Lord had closed Hannah's womb. In bitterness of soul, Hannah prayed to the Lord in the tabernacle for a son. Eli, the priest, observed her praying silently and misunderstood, thinking she had been drinking wine. Upon Hannah's explanation of praying out of great anguish and grief, Eli answered, "May the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him" (1 Samuel 1:17). Eventually, Hannah did give birth to a son, Samuel, and after weaning him, she brought Samuel to the house of the Lord at Shiloh and said to Eli:

  > As surely as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of Him. So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD (1 Samuel 1:26-28).

- God used David's years as a shepherd, during which he had encounters with a lion and a bear, to prepare him for facing the giant, Goliath. From his youth, David was prepared to be king of Israel and was "a man after God's own heart." Samuel

anointed David to replace Saul as king. But what happened? For years, Saul pursued David, trying to kill him. David had to flee and hide in caves in order to save his own life. Eventually, David became the greatest king in Israel's history.

- Jeremiah the prophet faithfully prophesied for 40 years during the final days of Judah's apostasy (before their Babylonian captivity). He was lonely, misunderstood, accused of treason, beaten, frequently imprisoned, cast into a muddy cistern and left to starve to death; but he was rescued, and his prophecies were ultimately fulfilled.
- The angel Gabriel told Mary her Son, Jesus, would be great and receive the throne of David—He would reign over the house of Jacob forever (Luke 1:26-35). Yet, she saw Him die on a cross! I am sure she expected a much different scenario than what occurred, but according to Scripture this prophecy will be fulfilled at His Second Coming.
- Jesus taught the disciples for three years before they were prepared to carry out His great commission. They were perplexed and fearful when He was crucified, but following His resurrection became bold witnesses empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- The Apostle John faithfully served Christ into his old age. He suffered greatly and was exiled on the island of Patmos because of the Word of God and his testimony for Jesus. While there the Lord gave him the visions and prophecies of the book of Revelation.

WHY DOES IT TAKE SO LONG?

I don't know why God sometimes takes so long before He fulfills His promises or answers the cry of the righteous. I don't know why it took 120 years before God fulfilled His word to Noah that He would destroy the world by a flood. I don't know why God allowed Abraham and Sarah to wait 25 years before He fulfilled His promise of Isaac (Genesis 12:2-4; 21:5). I don't know why God allowed Joseph to go through 13 years of difficulties before He fulfilled the

dream He had given him. I don't know why Moses had to be prepared for 40 years in Egypt and 40 years in the wilderness before God used him to deliver Israel from Egyptian bondage. I don't know why Naomi faced such adversity for all those years until God provided an heir to be in the lineage of the Messiah. I don't know why Hannah was humiliated year after year until God blessed her with the birth of Samuel—one of the greatest of Old Testament prophets.

I don't know why David had to wait so many years to actually become king over all Israel after being anointed king by Samuel. I don't know why Jeremiah was so mistreated in the midst of his complete faithfulness and obedience to God. I don't know why Mary had to suffer her deep anguish of soul watching Jesus' suffering and death, even though she was blessed to be His mother, and believed that what God said would be accomplished. I don't know why it was prophesied that Jesus' body would stay in the tomb for three days, while the disciples lost all hope. I don't know why Paul was left blind for three days after the Damascus road experience before receiving his sight. I don't always know why God works in the time or way He does. But I do know that God is faithful, and in His time and in His way, He will accomplish His purpose.

- Finally, we gain much insight from the account of Jesus' delay in visiting Lazarus, whose sickness resulted in death. Jesus loved Lazarus and his two sisters, Mary and Martha, yet when He heard Lazarus was sick, He remained where He was an additional two days. This delay seemed like indifference for the family whom He loved and who dearly loved and honored Him. Lazarus' sisters suffered much sorrow and emotional anguish, which Jesus could have alleviated if He had not purposely delayed His arrival and healed Lazarus before he died.

This temporary tragedy was allowed so that God would be glorified, the faith of Jesus' disciples' would be increased, and all believers in Christ would be given the profound hope of resurrection and eternal life. Although Jesus' timing and purpose was different

from what Mary and Martha had wanted, it proved a greater victory in the end than if Lazarus would have been healed when they desired. In the midst of our trials, God's will and His timing may be different than what we would like. However, His divine wisdom and love *always* prove best in the end.

Through the many years of my walk with Christ, I have learned that things do not always happen when I expect or how I want, but always, somehow, God is faithful and the outcome is victory.

I have told many believers desperate to run away and escape a difficult situation that God often does not change our circumstances until He changes our heart and we learn to live victoriously while in the difficulty. As Dr. David Osborn said, "Too often we try to use God to change our circumstances, while He is using our circumstances to change us." The Lord wants people who will strive to honor Him—day after day after day—no matter what their circumstances.

AN UNEXPECTED ANSWER

I had just finished lifting weights and playing trampoline basketball with a group of guys at our ministry center, when we decided to play football frenzy—a game I invented. Just an hour and a half earlier, I had ended a day's fast during which I was seeking the Lord for healing and other things. (Since a car accident over two and a half years earlier in Oregon, I had been going through therapy for my neck. Although it helped, I still had very limited mobility.)

During the game of football frenzy, I was guarding my younger brother. He faked to the left, so I followed; then he turned full speed in the opposite direction and hit me so hard on my left cheek with his forehead, that my head snapped back. I heard about six or seven loud grinding cracks in my neck. My left eye went blurry and I heard a ringing in my left ear. My left cheek quickly began to swell.

After checking the mirror to see how bad the damage was, I finished playing the game. My left cheekbone remained sore for almost two weeks, but after the soreness disappeared, I noticed that I had regained much of the mobility lost since the car accident: I could bend my head back to shave without much discomfort. A few

days after that football game, I got on the trampoline and did backflips for the first time in two and a half years. I still have occasional neck pain to remind me of that bad car accident, but I am greatly improved.

God is amazing! There is no way a doctor would have hit me hard enough to crack my neck the way my brother did. He had to hit at exactly the right speed and angle, and at the exact location on my cheek necessary to accomplish that! While the Lord didn't heal my neck when or how I expected, in His time and in His way, I am convinced that He lined up the circumstances to answer that prayer.

PUZZLE PIECE

Sometimes, when I am speaking on *Overcoming the Giants in Your Life*, I will pass a piece of a puzzle out to each person in attendance, with Romans 8:28 written on the back. The puzzle piece represents their circumstances right now. When all they see is that little piece of puzzle, it may seem like their problems are overwhelming and there is no hope or purpose to their situation. Yet, God has the photo and movie of their entire life! He knows how it all works out. Someday, when the puzzle pieces of our lives are all put together, we will see an amazing work of art that only God could have masterfully designed into a spectacular tapestry.

Keeping a Good Attitude

After the 12 spies went out to gather information about the Promised Land and its occupants, they returned to Moses and reported giants in the land. Moses himself had told the spies to see what the land was like, whether the people who lived there were strong or weak, and if the towns they lived in were unwalled or fortified (Numbers 13:17-20). So why does Scripture indicate that 10 of the spies gave what God called an evil report, while the report of Joshua and Caleb was called good? The 10 spies were *afraid* of the giants and *did not believe* God's promise that He would give them the land (Numbers 13:2). They said:

> We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are. The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them (Numbers 13:31-33).

As a result of the faithless report that was spread among the Israelites by the fearful spies, the people grumbled in their tents:

> The LORD hates us; so He brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of the Amorites to destroy us. Where can we go? Our brothers have made us lose heart. They say, "The people are stronger and taller than we are; the cities are large, with walls up to the sky. We even saw the Anakites there" (Deuteronomy 1:27-28).

Then Moses said to you,

> Do not be terrified; do not be afraid of them. The LORD your God, who is going before you, will fight for you, as he did for you in Egypt, before your very eyes (Deuteronomy 1:29-30).

Nevertheless, the devastating report of the 10 spies caused the Israelites to lose heart and the people began to murmur and complain.

> That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt" (Numbers 14:1-4).

Unless the Lord had intervened, they would have stoned Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 14:10).

The Israelites had praised the Lord when they saw Him do such incredible things as the:

- Miraculous signs, plagues and wonders in Egypt.
- Parting of the Red Sea.
- Pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.
- Water that gushed from the rock in the wilderness.
- Manna from heaven they were given to eat.

But how soon they forgot God's mighty acts on their behalf and His faithfulness in the past. Refusing to trust His promises concerning their future, they began first, to grumble; second, to complain; and third, to rebel when circumstances were less than ideal or they faced difficulties and saw giants.

> The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat Me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in Me, in

spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?" (Numbers 14:11).

Christians today, like most people, have that same natural inclination. Many believers praise the Lord only when He is blessing them. When they face obstacles or when God does not do what they want, they lose heart; they become discouraged and defeated. On a spiritual high or a mountaintop experience, they love the Lord. But when they are inconvenienced or encounter "giants," many murmur, complain, have a bad attitude and in rebellion, turn away from the Lord.

Numbers 14:20-38 gives God's insightful response following Moses' powerful intercession for Him not to destroy the Israelites:

> The LORD replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth, not one of those who saw My glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed Me and tested Me ten times— not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated Me with contempt will ever see it. But because My servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows Me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it. Since the Amalekites and the Canaanites are living in the valleys, turn back tomorrow and set out toward the desert along the route to the Red Sea. "
>
> The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: "How long will this wicked community grumble against Me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. So tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very thing I heard you say: In this wilderness your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against Me. Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.

> As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected. But as for you, your bodies will fall in this wilderness. Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the wilderness. For forty years—one year for each of the forty days you explored the land—you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have Me against you.' I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will surely do these things to this whole wicked community, which has banded together against Me. They will meet their end in this wilderness; here they will die."
>
> So the men Moses had sent to explore the land, who returned and made the whole community grumble against him by spreading a bad report about it— these men who were responsible for spreading the bad report about the land were struck down and died of a plague before the LORD. Of the men who went to explore the land, only Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh survived.

"LAND MINES"

You may have read about the "The Snow Run" (which occurred in winter) in my book *Reaching Your Maximum Potential in Christ*. Well, "Land Mines" happened in the spring, summer and fall.

Attitude is so important. When you lose hope or feel defeated, they become self-fulfilling prophecies. For example, when I am under an important deadline, I can work 18 hours a day and keep going as long as I have *hope*, feel something is being accomplished and have a positive attitude. That is why in everything I do, I try to keep a good attitude and turn obstacles into challenges.

After returning from speaking at Fort Stewart, a large Army base in Georgia, I was preparing to leave for more speaking engagements in California. I was working 16-hour days in order to get everything done before leaving. The newsletter had to be finished that evening so my staff could proofread it the next day. It would then be put on

a disk and taken to San Diego for one of my staff there to work on its design.

About 10 p.m. while preparing to proofread the newsletter at my house, I realized the pages must have been left in the printer tray at the ministry center, about 100 yards from my house. It was about 50 degrees outside and as I ran barefoot through the cool, dry grass, I noticed all the outside lights were off. The yard was almost pitch black. I could not even see the grass. All I could see in the distance was the light above the front door of the ministry center. In addition, our large Australian Shepherd (named Hosanna because we got her right before Easter) roamed the 3.7 acres between the house and ministry center and did her business on the lawn in random places. Since our yard was so rocky, I did not clean it up but let it break down for fertilizer. (You constantly had to watch where you walked or played soccer!)

At Fort Stewart, I had been briefed about land mines, so I decided to make the trek to the ministry center a challenge: I pretended the piles of dog manure were land mines. This is not how you are supposed to deal with land mines, but I ran lightly to the building, hoping I would not step on a "land mine" and have it squish between my toes. Arriving back at the house, I looked at my feet and they were still clean.

The point of this illustration? Instead of getting upset or complaining about the inconvenience of having to go back up to the building, when I was so pressed for time, I determined to have a good attitude and thereby turned it into a little adventure and a challenge. Likewise, be encouraged: no matter what obstacles you may be facing, rather than complain, keep a good attitude and turn obstacles into adventures and challenges.

BLESSED TO SUFFER FOR CHRIST

God desires believers who not only praise Him in the excitement of miracles He brings, but also trust, praise and honor Him when facing "giants" or adverse circumstances.

I was speaking at an Arab Center in California to people from several Muslim countries who knew firsthand suffering and persecution for Christ. One Iraqi man, who had been Saddam Hussein's English translator during Desert Storm, told me that when the United States was so accurately hitting Iraqi targets, he was falsely accused of providing secret information to the Americans. While he was being beaten, his attackers noticed that he was smiling and stopped. He shared with them how he was blessed to suffer for Christ. After the war, he and his pregnant wife fled Iraq to Jordan before coming to America.

Ten years later, I spoke in Jerusalem to Russian Jews on the topic of Armageddon and the Second Coming of Christ (they having requested it). Six days later their building was set on fire.

During our tenth Holy Land Adventure, we had a meeting with a pastor in Bethlehem who shared his amazing testimony with our group: He had been shot multiple times; his church had been set on fire and windows broken on several occasions. His brother was martyred in Bethlehem by three men with machetes, yet still, he boldly proclaims the Gospel in an extremely dangerous environment.

THROUGH THE EYES OF A CHILD

Two days before kindergarten started, my granddaughter, Reghan, broke her collarbone. As painful as that was, it also meant she could not take the horse riding lessons she longed for, even having given up dance lessons to fulfill this dream of hers.

On the fourth day of kindergarten, I had the opportunity to take Reghan to school. As I held her backpack, she struggled to pull out her lunch and papers to put into her cubbyhole. Reghan was right-handed so this was quite a task since her right arm was in a sling and she had to use her left hand. I gave her a kiss on the forehead and told her to try to have a wonderful day. Despite her physical injury and the disappointment of not being able to take horse riding lessons, she responded, "Papa, I always have a wonderful day!"

Oh, what a lesson we can learn from her words! The Bible clearly instructs us to have this attitude: "This is the day the LORD has

made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24). In Philippians (4:4), we are told to "Rejoice in the Lord always." As we make the choice to rejoice, we will learn that "the joy of the LORD is our strength" (Nehemiah 8:10).

FAITH AND PERSEVERANCE

Like her father, BJ, my granddaughter, Moriah, had great athletic potential until an injury changed the course of her life. An ankle injury disclosed a genetic foot and ankle problem, resulting in seven extensive surgeries to alleviate her constant pain and limited mobility.

Several years ago Moriah was a few months away from her third surgery—a full bone fusion bringing with it a long recovery process. Not knowing the outcome of this procedure, she chose to play soccer on the high school team that her father coached. Since running caused her tremendous pain, she decided to play goalie, and after weeks of hard training she was ready to play in her first game. In the process of making a diving save, her head hit the ground, resulting in what was her second concussion. She not only missed the next game, but the rest of the season. Although Moriah is not one to complain, in a moment of exhaustion she asked her father, "Why would God let this happen?"

As Christians, we often find ourselves facing circumstances that cause us to ask a similar question, "Why would God allow us to go through this?" Surely, an all-powerful and all-loving God could bring about His plan in a different way, so "why" would He allow this to happen?

This question was at the center of a conversation BJ had with his then 14-year-old daughter. Besides having to deal with a concussion that prevented Moriah from completing her first year of soccer, she faced a third surgery on her ankle. For the previous three years, she had struggled with chronic pain and lack of mobility in her left ankle, not only limiting her physical activity but also affecting her daily activities. Many measures had been taken to alleviate the pain but nothing brought relief. As the doctor said, "The surgery is only

designed to alleviate the pain. She still will lack mobility in her ankle and will need to avoid activities that require her to run on an uneven surface." For a young teenager who was physically active and loved to play sports, that was a bombshell.

BJ reiterated to Moriah that sometimes we do not know the "why," but this does not mean there is not a purpose. He shared how God could use these challenges to help her grow in her faith and enable her to encourage others going through similar situations. Ironically, I shared these same words with BJ when he faced ankle surgery at about the same age.

A few days after BJ and his daughter talked about the "why," Moriah's mother, Tara, was emptying the trash. In her daughter's trash can, she found the rough draft of a letter Moriah had written to Ryan Shazier. Ryan played football for the Pittsburgh Steelers and had suffered a severe back injury. Below is an excerpt:

> Dear Ryan, I am praying for you every day. I know how it feels to go through a difficult time. I am going to be having a third ankle surgery because of a birth defect. It causes me to have a lot of pain when I do physical activity. So I have to pretty much rest and ice my ankle every night. Sometimes we don't know why God lets us go through difficult times. My favorite singer, Tauren Wells, has helped me to understand more why God has me going through all of this. His song "God's Not Done With You" reminds us that though we might be going through something difficult God has a plan for us and He will use it to bless us and others.
>
> Even though no one knows why you had to be the one to hurt your back, God knows and He will use it for the plans He has for you! I will continue to pray for you and I hope you feel better soon!

Moriah's surgery was to be a three-hour operation. When BJ was on his way home from the hospital later that night to be with his other five children before heading back to Children's Hospital in Pittsburgh the next day, he called on his cell phone to say, "Dad,

now I understand what it was like for you and Mom to go through all my soccer injuries and surgeries."

BJ's situation had been similar to Moriah's: after his third knee injury, while still a freshman in college, Dr. Freddie Fu told him that his soccer career was over. BJ remembers the frustration, pain and anger that he felt. He wondered why God would allow this to happen to him, and as he sat in the doctor's office with his daughter, those same emotions surfaced again.

On the drive home, his daughter did not say much as BJ and Tara spoke with her about the upcoming surgery and its implications. Following their arrival, he looked out the kitchen window and saw Moriah lying in the hammock with her Bible and prayer journal. He was reminded of what God had done in his life. As God had worked through his pain, he was confident that God would work through her pain, create in her a woman after His own heart "as a deer longs for streams of water" (Psalm 42:1 NET).

Tears rolled down his face as he watched his daughter doing what she does every day—spending time with her Lord and Savior. It was such an encouragement to him. Despite the fact that she had just received disappointing news with life-long implications, she still desired to be in the Lord's presence. While Moriah was never able to play another game of soccer, and BJ never had the chance to coach her in high school, he gladly surrendered all that to have a daughter who loves God more than anything else. His greatest desire for Moriah is to see her grow into a young woman who desires to see Christ glorified in everything she does.

Moriah's sixth surgery was done in December 2021, and her seventh in December 2022—hopefully, the final one needed to alleviate her constant pain. Now in her second year of studying physical therapy at Penn State University (Shenango Valley Campus) where her dad is a part-time professor, there is no doubt that Moriah's suffering and experience will help her to be a wonderful therapist as she helps others with similar setbacks.

Like my granddaughter, many of you reading this book face difficult circumstances. As well as seeking God's deliverance and asking "why," pray for God to work in your life through these

challenges to mold you into the person He wants you to be. Sometimes the most important answer to our prayer is what God is doing in us in the middle of our adversities. We serve a God who is faithful! Consider the following promises in the Bible:

> We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation (Romans 5:3-4 NLT).
>
> Consider it pure joy...whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything (James 1:2-4).
>
> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Through all her trials, Moriah's relationship with Christ has deepened, and her young life excels as a testimony of faith and perseverance.

The surgeon came in and hugged Moriah before her seventh surgery. He said, "I want you to know that I start every morning by spending time in prayer. And I'm praying that God uses me to make you well so you can finally live your life."

At a follow-up visit a couple months after surgery, the doctor told Moriah, "Everything went well!" He informed her that everything is healing up and that she has no restrictions and the pain should start going away over the next few months. They had a nice discussion about the Christian music she listens to so he is going to listen to it on his way home.

LOSING AND WINNING

My son, BJ, 20 at the time, had just finished practice with the high school soccer team he coached. For a few minutes we sat together on a swing overlooking the ministry center's property. The trees were a lush green, and birds were flying overhead against a backdrop of brilliant blue sky. As we pondered the beauty all around us, I remarked, "The heavens declare the glory of our God, and He created us to glorify Him. When we seek to honor Him with all our hearts and in everything we do, it will go well for us in the end." I had learned a crucial lesson: When I honor the Lord, I cannot lose. When I dishonor Him, I cannot win.

INTO THE LORD'S CARE

On Mother's Day, May 11, 1997 (10 years to the day my father died), my daughter Tabitha moved to San Diego, California—just about the farthest place in the U.S. from her home in Pennsylvania! It was most difficult to see her go because, along with our son, she was the joy of our lives and a great asset to the ministry—the most wonderful daughter a parent could ask for. We were losing a daughter, best friend and staff worker whose bubbling love, joy and enthusiasm livened up the ministry center and encouraged all who met her. She also helped me with the 10 books I had been working on for the past two years—one of the hardest tasks I had ever done.

We had almost lost Tabitha once before to Paraguay where she did her student teaching for college. She had contemplated staying permanently. But now our beautiful, vivacious daughter was definitely moving to San Diego. Our lives would never be the same. Tabitha and her mom sang a duet at church on Mother's Day, and then we went out to eat as a family in Akron, Ohio, where we said our goodbyes.

Tabitha had been earnestly seeking the Lord's direction for her life for the past two years and felt He was leading her to San Diego. The Lord had been so faithful to us in the past, how could we now not trust Him with our future? Although she was facing many obstacles, I knew that if the Lord was in it, no obstacle could thwart His plan.

THE UNFOLDING PLAN

As the psalmist says:

> Since You are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of Your name lead and guide me (Psalms 31:3).

So it was with Tabitha. After seeking employment for over a month while staying at her cousin's apartment in San Diego, the Lord moved. Tabitha was hired at the very school she had wanted, and for the teaching position (second grade) she had hoped for, being chosen from among many other applicants. This couldn't have come at a better time, since according to apartment guest policy, she had stayed close to the end of her allotted time and would soon have to vacate the premises. Where would she live now that she had a teaching position and had to leave her cousin's apartment? She prayed about it. As she was waiting for God's answer and contemplated her possibilities, an apartment unexpectedly opened up right below her cousin's apartment and next door to her future fiancé, Clayton, giving her the perfect living location.

Clayton was to become the husband Tabitha had prayed for so earnestly and waited for so patiently. A little less than a year after their marriage, they bought a house in San Diego and offered us a portion of it to be used for a West Coast branch of our ministry. As Joseph had gone to Egypt to prepare the way for his family, so the Lord had led Tabitha to San Diego to prepare the way for hers.

FACE REALITY, BUT TRUST GOD

A Christian psychologist friend thought his life and counseling were purposeless. I asked him if he were dead. When he responded, "No," I informed him that he cannot make a proper evaluation until his life is nearly over. Then I asked, "Are you God in that you can see all the ramifications of your previous and future ministry efforts?" Again, he replied, "No," to which I encouraged him that he had touched more lives than he could know, and that God was not done with him yet, and the later part of his ministry could prove to touch even more

lives for Christ. Those words were literally fulfilled as within a few years he was going on mission trips around the world and working for Christ in some very remote and dangerous areas.

God does not want us to be negative and pessimistic; nor does He want us to flippantly confess that we have no problems. When Karen had cancer, and the time I was bitten by a brown recluse spider, I acknowledged her cancer was real, and the brown recluse bite was very dangerous and painful. However, we trusted and honored the Lord during both experiences. We had the attitude that if she or I live, we live for the Lord, and if she or I die, we go to be with the Lord.

We all face "giants"! The determining factor is not the "giants" we face. Most important is the attitude we have while facing those "giants." If we think that the "giants" in our lives are impossible to overcome, we are already defeated. When we have faith in the Lord, we know that no matter what circumstance prevails, He will work it out for good and we will ultimately be victorious.

BITTER OR BETTER?

Life is not just about what happens to you, but how you respond to what happens. Your past and current circumstances can make you bitter or better. Allow God to use them to make you better. It is not always the "giants," but often our fear of the "giants" that defeats us. Either your fear will erode faith or your faith will overcome your fear.

My goal during our first ministry center building project was for the Lord to be glorified through miracle after miracle so people would see that the Lord brought it about—not us. I assumed in those earlier days of ministry that everything would go smoothly all the time. I did not expect problems, obstacles, financial shortages or setbacks—just miracles. The Lord spoke to my heart that even more than the miracles He performed, He is glorified when we, under difficult conditions and faced with obstacles, still trust, praise and honor Him.

It is easy to thank the Lord and testify when things are going well, when a goal is reached or blessed with a miraculous intervention. But He wants us to have an attitude of trust and thanks even when we face perplexing problems—before our goal is met and victory looks possible.

I had many speaking engagements during our building projects, and even if we were low on funds or enduring tough circumstances, I always acknowledged my trust in the Lord and assured the people that God would somehow enable us to finish all that He led us to do. And He was faithful to do so.

WARNINGS

Murmuring and complaining before the LORD can be very dangerous. The 10 spies who gave a bad report (causing the people to grumble) were struck down and died of a plague (Numbers 14:36-37). It was because the people murmured and rebelled in disbelief that they were made to wander in the wilderness for 40 years (Numbers 14:20-35); they lost the reward of obedience.

By parallel illustration, when we murmur and complain today, we are left to wander in frustration. Complaining drains our health and vitality. It renders us spiritually ineffective and produces a negative testimony. Through the Apostle Paul, God warns New Testament believers that His judgment on Israel for her unbelief and disobedience should serve as a warning to us:

> For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.
>
> Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be

idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry." We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.

These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come (First Corinthians 10:1-11).

Hebrews 3:7-19 admonishes believers in every age:

So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion, during the time of testing in the wilderness, where your ancestors tested and tried Me, though for forty years they saw what I did. That is why I was angry with that generation; I said, 'Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known My ways.' So I declared on oath in My anger, 'They shall never enter My rest.' "

See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original conviction firmly to the very end. As has just been said: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion."

Who were they who heard and rebelled? Were they not all those Moses led out of Egypt? And with whom was He angry for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies perished in the wilderness? And to whom did God swear that they would never enter His rest if not to those who

disobeyed? So we see that they were not able to enter, because of their unbelief.

Hebrews 4:11 admonishes:

> Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall by following their example of disobedience.

It was not until that generation of grumblers were dead in the wilderness that Joshua and Caleb and the new generation of Israelites were brought into the Promised Land. No wonder the Apostle Paul said to "Do everything without grumbling or arguing" (Philippians 2:14). Paul also said, "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). We do not give thanks *for* everything, but *in the midst* of everything.

TRUST: THE ROAD TO VICTORY

- Joshua and Caleb agreed that there were giants in the land, but God called their report good. Why? They knew that the giants were real, strong and intimidating. But instead of comparing the giants to themselves, they compared them to the awesome and all-powerful God they served. Caleb said:

> We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it (Numbers 13:30).

Then they urged the people:

> Do not rebel against the LORD. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the LORD is with us. Do not be afraid of them (Numbers 14:9).

Joshua and Caleb knew it *looked* impossible, but they also knew that their God could do the impossible and that He would be faithful to fulfill what He had promised. Our proper biblical attitude and confession should be: "Although my 'giants' are real, the God I serve

is greater than any 'giant,' problem, obstacle or opposition I encounter. Through Him I can—and eventually will—overcome every 'giant' I face."

It is usually not the "giants" that defeat us, but our *fear* of the "giants." Either fear will erode your faith in the Lord, or your faith will overcome your fear. You must decide whether you will be victimized by fear and unbelief or whether you will overcome your fear and doubt through faith and trust in the Lord.

- We learn from the example of King Saul that God expects us to trust Him and obey Him no matter what our circumstances. First Samuel 13:5-14 indicates that the Philistines, with an army as numerous as the sand on the seashore, were assembled to fight Israel. Samuel (who had anointed Saul king) had not arrived at the appointed time to offer sacrifice for the Lord's favor, and Saul's army was scattering from him. The situation was so desperate that Saul felt compelled to offer the sacrifice himself instead of waiting for Samuel's priestly assistance. Samuel arrived just as Saul finished making the offering, and severely rebuked Saul for disobeying the Lord's command. Saul had also disobeyed other commands of God, and as a result, God rejected Saul as king.

No matter what our circumstances, we must trust and obey.

- A storm on the Sea of Galilee almost capsized the disciples' boat in the waves. They were terrified knowing they could die. Jesus rebuked them for having so little faith. Luke 8:23-25 tells us:

> As they sailed, He fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger. The disciples went and woke Him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!" He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm

> subsided, and all was calm. "Where is your faith?" He asked His disciples….

Caught in a situation in which they were about to perish, Jesus *still* expected them to trust Him. Trusting God requires faith.

Hebrews 11:1-2 says:

> Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for.

Hebrews 11:6 states:

> And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

Hebrews 11:32-39 inspires us:

> And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. These were all commended for their faith….

WOULD I TRUST HIM?

The high winds from Hurricane Ike hit our area of Western Pennsylvania on Sunday September 14, 2008, blowing for over five hours, but with no rain. From about 7:00 to 9:30 p.m. I lay in a hammock tied between two trees in my yard. Karen told me the winds would be about 55 mph, but after about an hour, I told her they had to be gusting at 70 mph. She went on the computer and confirmed that indeed they were (as did the local newspaper two days later).

The clouds sped overhead as branch debris fell on me and the hammock. The branches of my two trees would bend and then flutter erratically from the high gusts of wind that whipped through every couple of minutes.

I was not tempting the Lord but wanted a lesson in faith from the Bible. As my hammock tossed back and forth in the wind, I thought about the account of Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee through the storm and the waves crashing over the disciples. I contemplated that if the Lord was walking on the wind, would I get out of my hammock to join Him? So, I climbed one of the trees and prepared to walk on the wind—not really! But as darkness settled in, I did imagine the ground was water with high waves from the wind. I thought, "If my Lord was asleep in the boat (my hammock) would I trust Him as the waves crashed over? If my Lord was walking on the waves and told me to come, would I get out of my boat and walk on the waves to Him in the middle of the storm?" After thinking about it for a while, I believed I would.

After staying out there for two and a half hours, swinging back and forth in my hammock— almost ejected a few times—I learned, in a small way, the faith our God requires.

PEACE IN THE MIDST OF CHALLENGES

My wife and I were preparing for an upcoming ministry trip to New Brunswick, Canada, and had many challenges and concerns to face. Karen had a torn tendon in her foot and her brace still had not arrived. I had injured my right knee playing soccer. Dorm sleeping

arrangements with the other men on cots would not be conducive for me to prepare and review four messages for the weekend retreat. My daughter was part way into a high-risk pregnancy.

Our three-year-old grandson was suddenly unable to walk for some unknown reason and his six-year-old sister had stomach pain (though both recovered the night before we left).

In the middle of all this, the Lord spoke peace to my heart and that He would take care of things even as He has in the past. And so He did! He blessed and protected us in many ways: Karen made the whole trip without the brace or any limitations because the doctor wrapped her foot the day before we left. I ended up sleeping with my host and his son in a semiprivate room at the men's retreat. The three of us later went about eight miles into the wilderness near their house in New Brunswick and also climbed up 30-foot high sand dunes on Prince Edward Island in 70 mph wind. My knee held up well but was sore when I got back home to Pennsylvania. The Lord anointed my four messages. A student at the university majoring in geology testified before the congregation on Sunday morning that it was "the most powerful and life-changing weekend of his life."

NO MATTER WHAT

The Lord teaches us, through our circumstances, to always trust Him—no matter what. For example, during the early days of my ministry, I was scheduled to speak at a church over an hour away. We were due there by 9:30 a.m.; absolutely no later than 10:30 a.m. Karen and I left our children with my sister the night before, and my younger brother plus another teen who helped with our media equipment stayed all night so we could get an early start.

Our van was loaded and our team ready to go by 8:00 a.m. so we could arrive in plenty of time to set up. But the van wouldn't start. After a few minutes and several tries, it started up but then stalled and wouldn't start again. A neighbor just happened to walk out of his door. He tried to jump-start the van, but while doing so, the pressure plate went out and the clutch pedal stuck to the floor, making it impossible to drive. Canceling wasn't even an option. I had

never before missed a speaking engagement and was determined not to then!

We thought of borrowing a station wagon or van, but when we called, we were informed that one friend's van had a blown engine and another friend couldn't start her station wagon in the cold. Finally, we located an available station wagon. My neighbor drove me over, but when we arrived, it wouldn't start either. After trying to locate jumper cables for 10 minutes, I noticed the car had a flat tire, so I told the owner to forget it. Our ride took us back to our apartment.

Ironically, I was to speak that day on Romans 8:28 (NASB), "Life in the Pressure Cooker"—how all things "work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." The Lord seemed to be asking, "Do you really believe what you are going to preach?" I said, "Yes!"

At 9:15 a.m. still with no transportation, the Lord spoke to my heart, "Trust Me." So, we held hands, prayed and decided that no matter what, we would have a good attitude and not murmur and complain. The Lord then brought to my mind a person to call. Karen telephoned this person whose sister just "happened" to have a station wagon we could borrow. They brought it to our apartment and we had it loaded by 9:35 a.m. We arrived at the church at 10:35 a.m. with just enough time to get everything ready. In spite of the seemingly impossible circumstances and a frustrating morning, the service went very well, and as a result of the morning message and evening media presentation, the church put our ministry on their missions budget.

One of the reminders on my prayer and fasting list is to ask the Lord to:

> Forgive me and help me by Your Spirit to replace impatience, a bad attitude, murmuring, complaining and rebellion with patience, endurance, perseverance, determination, faithfulness, and an attitude of trusting, honoring, and praising You no matter what.

For every obstacle I face, for every promise I am trusting Him to fulfill, and for every time I believe that He is leading me to do something, I want my prayer to be, "Lord, help me to have:

- Unwavering faith to believe and trust You.
- Sensitivity, discernment and wisdom concerning what to do and how to do it.
- Obedience to do it.
- Motivation and determination to persevere until You fulfill it.
- An attitude and lips that honor You.
- An understanding mind and heart to learn the lessons You are teaching me through this.
- The opportunity and circumstances to bring resolution in Your time and way.
- Your courage, strength, power, anointing and authority to accomplish it.
- The ultimate end result to be victory for Your honor and glory.

God's "Boot Camp"

What is the most rigorous training—Military boot camp, mixed martial arts, Olympic training? No! God's "boot camp" is more challenging than anything else. God has a personalized "boot camp" for each of you—more formidable even than the Marine Corps or Special Forces.

An unknown author wrote, "The worth of a soldier is never known in time of peace. In the heat of the battle is when our true character manifests."

MONUMENTAL TASK FOR MOSES

The Lord had a monumental task for Moses—to lead an ungrateful, unbelieving, murmuring, complaining and rebellious people from Egyptian bondage through many hardships to the Promised Land. On occasion, Moses cried out to the Lord that the task was too hard (Numbers 11:10-15). Even the Lord became angry with these grumbling people on several occasions (Numbers 11:1, 10; 12:9; 14:11…). But God had taken Moses through a personalized "boot camp"—40 years in Egypt and 40 years in the wilderness—and Moses was prepared to fulfill God's purpose.

Moses spent the last 40 years of his life leading the Israelites in the wilderness until all the men of military age when they left Egypt had died (Joshua 5:6). Those years in the wilderness also served as "boot camp" for the younger generation of Israelites who would inherit the Promised Land:

> Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep His commands. He humbled you, causing you to

> hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.
>
> He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you (Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 15-16).

BOOT CAMP IS NEVER PLEASANT

I used to run total fitness classes and defense clinics. I developed various drills and rigorous training methods to teach the students discipline and determination. One of the drills I did was to line everyone up and spar one after another of them for one to three minutes. Sometimes I would spar with two or three of them at the same time. Then I had them do the same thing among themselves. I did this to make them strong and to develop their endurance, so they would be able to deal with almost any attack situation. So too, God desires to mold us so that we can stand in any situation and face and overcome any obstacle.

One teenager, who had moved to Colorado with his family, came back for a month to Pennsylvania in the summer. He said to me, "Bill, I am going into the Army. You have one month to do whatever you want to get me in shape for boot camp." I said, "I will do it if you agree to do everything you are told without complaining." He agreed.

I made him jog several miles a day, bike, jump on a trampoline, do push-ups, pull-ups, sit-ups, lift weights, box and spar me and other people, run obstacle courses and do other rigorous training. He wrote a letter thanking me because he was able to handle basic training with much greater ease than most of the other soldiers. Since then I have trained many Army, Navy and Marine Corps

recruits on our obstacle course—all with the same stipulation: do everything without complaining.

God has a "boot camp" that is far more rigorous than military, martial arts or Olympic training. He trains us in the "wilderness" with life-changing experiences. Joseph, Moses, Naomi, Ruth, David, Daniel, Paul—all the heroes of the faith—went through their personalized "boot camp" as they faced numerous obstacles and difficulties. At the time, I am certain they would have loved to have avoided them, but they later proved to be the very means by which the LORD molded their lives and prepared them to accomplish His purpose.

DON'T YOU LOVE ME?

The Israelites actually thought the Lord hated them and brought them out of Egypt to deliver them into the hands of the Amorites to destroy them (Deuteronomy 1:27). That statement could not have been further from the truth. They would later learn that although their wilderness wander was a consequence of their sin, the Lord *was* with them and carried them as a father carries a son (Deuteronomy 1:31). He watched over them in the vast wilderness and saw that they lacked nothing (Deuteronomy 2:7)—neither clothes nor sandals wore out, nor did their feet swell (Deuteronomy 8:4; 29:5; Nehemiah 9:21). God provided them manna from heaven (Exodus 16:35; Deuteronomy 8:16; Psalm 78:24; John 6:31). He disciplined them because He loved them (Hebrews 12:5-11).

When I was about 10 years of age, I was involved with gymnastics and the Whiz Kids at the Buhl Club. My older brother Ken was an assistant to the director, Mr. Record. During training my brother was especially hard on me. At first I thought it was so the other Whiz Kids would not think he was playing favorites. He was tougher on me and made me train harder than anyone else. One day while we were walking home, I asked my brother, "Don't you love me?" He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "You are harder on me than anyone else. You are constantly making me do things over and over." He said, "Don't you understand, Billy? I love you the most. I want

you to be the best you can be." From that day on, it did not matter what he said or did, I knew he loved me and that he was doing it for my good. Likewise, God loves you! You are His child and He wants you to be the best you can be—"to reach your maximum potential in Christ" so to speak. Once you really believe that, you can trust Him and have peace no matter what your circumstances. If you are yielded to Him, He truly is allowing things in your life, ultimately, for your good.

SO HARD FOR SO LONG

At times in the past, I wondered why God makes it so hard for so long. But then I realized that as a soccer coach, I always trained my players harder than other team players. As a result, we won four championships during the four years I coached youth soccer. As a fitness instructor at a health spa, they called me a drill sergeant because I worked them so hard. When I taught self-defense and karate (before the Lord led me out of it), I made it harder than any instructor had made it on me, because I wanted them to be able to handle any situation on the street.

In your walk with the Lord, remember:

- If you want the mountaintops, you must go through the valleys.
- If you want the green pasture and still waters, you must go through the wilderness.
- If you want the oasis, you must cross the desert.
- If you want spiritual power, you must develop spiritual muscles.
- If you want victories, you must fight battles.
- If you want to see God do the impossible, then you must stand in faith in impossible situations.
- It has been accurately stated, "You cannot have a testimony without a test!"

MOUNTAINTOPS AND VALLEYS

Miracles let us know that a real and personal God is working in our lives and through our ministries. These are our mountaintop experiences. They are exciting and rejuvenating. They encourage us and build faith, and give validity to our faith in an unbelieving, skeptical world. Others see that our God is real and that He intervenes in the lives of those who are obedient to His will.

When we face the "giants" of obstacles and difficulties, when we feel trapped in dark valleys, barren wilderness or parched deserts, God is molding our character, faith and determination and developing our strength and spiritual muscles. It is then that our testimony shines most brightly in the world. They see a faith that stands the test. They realize that, like Job, "Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him" (Job 13:15).

Habakkuk concludes his biblical prophecy with one of the greatest doxologies ever written:

> Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength... (Habakkuk 3:17-19).

STRANDED IN THE JUDEAN WILDERNESS

During a Middle East outreach to Jordan, Israel and Egypt, I had a free day between speaking engagements at a messianic congregation and youth rallies in Cairo. I boarded a bus in Jerusalem heading to Ein Gedi on the west side of the Dead Sea. On the bus were many Israeli soldiers and civilians. Accidentally (or perhaps purposely), I was told to get off at the wrong spot. Stranded near a small resort on the Dead Sea, I tried to catch a ride south to my destination at Ein Gedi, but no one at this location was heading in that direction. Finally, one of the workers who was leaving realized my dilemma and offered me a ride part of the way. She said, "I am

probably not doing you a favor, but if you wait at the bus stop (four posts, a small roof and a bench) where I leave you and point your hand to the road, someone will pick you up."

She dropped me off at an isolated spot in the Judean Wilderness. Except for an occasional vehicle (car, truck, transportation bus or tour bus) which whizzed by in spite of my hitchhiking skills, not even buses loaded with American tourists would stop for me! The people on the buses were friendly, waving as they sped by. There was no way I could communicate to them that I was a stranded American Christian. They assumed from external appearance that I was just a local, hitching a ride. (I had been told thumbing is offensive in the Middle East, so I stood there with my hand pointed at the road.)

It was hot and dry, the rugged terrain barren and desolate—an extremely lonely place. Realizing I was hopelessly stranded in the Judean Wilderness without water, I asked the Lord, "What am I doing here? Why did You let me end up here?" Then He spoke to my heart to look around. I realized that many people mentioned in the Bible were molded in this rugged, remote wilderness—and places like it. I spent some time praying and reflecting on the terrain and circumstances God used to shape many heroes of the faith—not just for a few hours, but oftentimes for months and even years.

I became aware of how people must feel stranded in the "wilderness of life" and looking for a way out: longing to be delivered, yet not knowing who will come along to rescue them.

Sadly, Christians who ride along in the comfort and security of life's "air conditioned buses" can be totally oblivious to the needs of those around them who may be "stranded," like the tourists who drove by me. That's our problem: we assume too much. No one took the time to find out if I needed help; they just smiled, waved and kept on going. As Christians, we need the mindset that it is our calling to seek the lost and searching of this world and minister to them the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who alone can deliver them from the barren and threatening wilderness of life without Him.

After an hour and a half (when I thought no one would be giving me a ride), a bus unexpectedly pulled into this remote stop. I

jumped on and discovered I was only a few miles from my intended destination! It proved to be an oasis in the rugged wilderness.

When I travel overseas and minister to those who have faced persecution and hardships for the Gospel, and though they may be impressed by the miracles I share, they want to know, "Have I suffered like them for the sake of the Gospel? Have I faced adversity and hardships yet remained faithful to Jesus Christ?" I can distinguish between those who have been purified and refined through overwhelming hardships and those who have not. The ones who have gone "through the fire" have a deeper relationship with Christ and are less prone to worldliness and foolishness. A pastor or Christian leader will be more effective once he or she has "gone through the fire."

ARMED "WAGON TRAIN"

Getting to the youth rallies I was scheduled to speak at in Cairo, required a caravan of armed guards in vehicles through Egypt. A two-hour bus ride took us from Jerusalem to the southern border of Israel, along the Mediterranean to Rafah, where we changed buses and entered Egypt. After a five-hour bus ride through the desert, we took a ferry across the Suez Canal on our way to Cairo. Our caravan throughout Egypt consisted of three buses (with only eight of us on our bus) and a military vehicle with four armed guards in front and one at the end, as well as an armed guard on each bus. We traveled much of the time at 75 mph with the vehicles often only inches apart so no one could cut in and separate us.

When we stopped for gas in the Sinai Peninsula, I pointed out to the others how the buses and military vehicles formed a pyramid barrier around us with the armed guards standing in position between the gaps. It resembled a wagon train encircled in preparation for an Indian attack! They told us it is custom—like VIP treatment—but I am certain it was for protection from potential terrorists. Like the armed guards, our God surrounds us with His presence, peace and protection.

One of the pyramids we visited while in Egypt was 136 meters high. The tour guide asked if anyone wanted to climb inside it. He said there was really nothing to see, but it would be an adventure. Always up for an adventure, I decided to do it. We climbed a steep incline—sometimes running to save time and often in a bent-over position—90 meters inside a narrow tunnel until we came to a large room. The air was thin and dusty the whole time and my legs were sore, but it was worth it.

"ARE YOU NUTS?'

Jim Weikal wrote the following concerning a ministry trip to Israel with me four years later:

> When I announced that I was going on a trip to Israel in January of 2002 with Bill, people did not hesitate to offer their insight: "Are you nuts?" "Don't forget your flak jacket." "Do you have a will?" "Don't forget to say 'Hi Mom' during your hostage interview on world news." But these comments didn't affect my decision or deter my resolve to go.
>
> Bill is not the type to back down when circumstances seem contrary or things get dangerous. We were not being presumptuous, but merely obedient to what the Lord had led us to do, then trusting Him to take care of us. And He did!
>
> Before this trip was over, I would see God's protection on our lives because there were two suicide bombings, one in Tel Aviv and another in Jerusalem. A woman (the first female suicide bomber) detonated herself on a Sunday, and exactly where we had been just 23 hours earlier after Bill ministered to a messianic congregation in the Jewish Quarter. We had left Sar Shalom on Ben Yehuda Street (a place known for violent trouble and suicide bombers) walking half a block to King's Highway and then a block to the corner of King's Highway and Jaffa Road—exactly where she later blew herself up, killing one other person and injuring 115 people.

DEVELOPING SPIRITUAL MUSCLES

"Giants" and obstacles are like exercise. Exercise works because of resistance. The greater the resistance, the bigger and stronger your muscles become. The more "giants" we face, the more character and spiritual muscles we develop.

Often, what I have wanted God to deliver me from was the very thing He used to make me stronger and to teach me some of life's most valuable lessons. Something happens in the wilderness, the valley and the desert that does not happen on the mountaintop; God builds character, strength, faith and determination as He molds our lives to accomplish His will, molding us into the man or woman God has called us to be.

After my son tore his ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) for the second time while playing soccer, the orthopedic surgeon gave us no alternative but extensive knee surgery. On the way home from that appointment I told him that, "Trials, obstacles and difficulties put iron in our blood and make us strong as nails." This proved to be true in his life.

For about 10 years during our early Christian lives and ministry, Karen and I lived in extreme poverty. It looked as though we would never have anything. Over the years, we faced the "giants" of many hard times, difficulties and impossible circumstances, but the Lord somehow always intervened in His time and way to enable us to overcome them. I often wondered why, throughout my Christian life and in our ministry, God permitted so many difficulties; we seemed to do everything the hard way. Yet, God has taught me the truth that all things work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Romans 8:28). I have walked with the Lord for more than 50 years, and I can honestly testify to the true reality of this scriptural promise.

I am glad we have persevered through our impoverished beginnings and the struggles of hard times. Since the Lord has greatly blessed my life and ministry, no one can say that I serve Him only for all the blessings He has given me. I served the Lord when we had nothing—with no hope of ever having anything—and I serve

the Lord when He blesses. If He takes away everything He has given to me, I will still serve Him.

PROSPERITY AND MEMORY

When our gracious God provides us with material blessings, success and leadership positions, the risk of temptation to pride, greed and sexual immorality also increases. Many have fallen away from the Lord during times of prosperity, so let us heed Moses' warning to the Israelites who were about to enter the Promised Land:

> When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land He has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe His commands, His laws and His decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery (Deuteronomy 8:10-14).

Hosea 13:4-9 reveals the consequences of forgetting the Lord in times of being satisfied:

> But I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt. You shall acknowledge no God but Me, no Savior except Me. I cared for you in the wilderness, in the land of burning heat. When I fed them, they were satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; then they forgot Me. So I will come upon them like a lion, like a leopard I will lurk by the path. Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I will attack them and rip them open. Like a lion I will devour them; a wild animal will tear them apart. You are destroyed, O Israel, because you are against Me, against your Helper.

Hebrews 12:5-11 makes known that the Lord disciplines those that He loves for our own benefit:

> And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when He rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, and He punishes everyone He accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Psalm 103:8-13 tells of the compassion that the Lord has for those who fear [reverence] Him:

> The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will He harbor His anger forever; He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.

The Lord often hides His face so that we will seek Him with all our hearts. The Lord allows hard times so that we will remain dependent upon Him. The Lord allows circumstances to strengthen us so that we will stand strong in any situation. The Lord molds us through

“boot camp” so we might become who He intended us to be. The Lord disciplines those He loves so that we will fulfill the purpose He has for our lives.

Achieving Ultimate Victory

While ministering in Florida one February, we were in the Fort Myers area staying with friends. Before leaving, the husband asked me to go into the swamp with him. He said, "It will be a challenge—and we'll see some alligators and snakes." I asked the Lord and my wife, and then said, "Okay, I'll go with you." When I responded affirmatively, he said, "You know Bill, I used to think you were crazy, but now I know you are crazy. Nobody who has visited me before has been willing to go into the swamp."

We went into the swamp wading through cold water. It gradually became deeper, until it was above our waists. We had to feel our way along the bottom of the murky swamp with our feet to avoid tripping over tree roots and stumps—and to avoid falling into any holes. In the process, I did bang up my shin and I did fall into a few holes!

We enjoyed seeing exotic birds (and hawks and owls), but we also had to cautiously watch the trees above our heads for poisonous snakes and spider webs. We had to scan the top of the water for alligators and watch the brush areas lest we get too close to their nests, causing the mother alligators to become aggressive. Often we were in waist-to-chest-deep water and out in the open with no trees to climb. We were vulnerable to any alligator that might decide to attack us because we were in water too deep to kick and protect ourselves. We walked around under these conditions for an hour, and although I later learned that February is not the time of year for female alligators to have babies, it didn't lessen the stress factor at the time.

I compare going through that swamp to walking with the Lord. We are going to face dangers, difficulties and obstacles, but I have also discovered that living for the Lord is the most exciting, challenging

and adventurous lifestyle available. If you don't believe me, ask those who have gone with me on mission trips! God never promised He would remove all of our "giants," and He didn't promise us an easy lifestyle. He did promise, however, to be with us always.

GOD IS WITH YOU, ALWAYS WITH YOU

One autumn, my wife Karen and I traveled to Colorado Springs on a ministry trip accompanied by a couple serving on our staff. Because of dense fog, we arrived several hours late. We were forced to land in Denver, detoured because the plane was running out of fuel from circling Colorado Springs, waiting for the fog to lift. The dense fog, which had shut down the airport, finally lifted and we were able to fly on to Colorado Springs.

For our sleeping accommodations, we had booked Town and Country Cottages located at the edge of the Rockies. They were reasonably priced and had a scenic view. Key to this story is the fact that the travel book on Colorado showed Town and Country as 5.2 miles from the highway, but as we later discovered (the hard way), these cottages were only 0.3 miles away.

Exhausted from the stressful flight, we were looking forward to a short drive (so we thought) into the foothills of the mountains, and Karen loves the mountains—provided the roads are not too narrow, steep or dangerous. It was my turn to drive. Darkness and fog created poor visibility, making travel conditions dangerous as we headed toward the cottage where we could obtain some much-needed sleep.

Being in the mountains, we assumed there would be winding roads, but didn't anticipate such sharp and continuous bends. After only a mile and a half, we came to a private gate. We backtracked a mile but were convinced that we had not gotten off the main road, so we turned around again. A car in front of us went through the gate, so we pulled up to it. It opened, so I drove through, thinking it was a public access through a private area on the way to our cottage.

As we continued, the road got steeper with more bends and dangerous winding curves. The cliffs appeared to be very high and extremely steep. The dirt road was muddy as we edged up the mountain hoping to see the sign for our cottage. As we ascended, Karen became frightened and began to cry. I tried comforting her by assuring her that we would make it safely. The other couple also tried to encourage her.

We traveled the 5.2 miles based on the travel book information, but no cottage was in sight. To get help with directions, I stopped a car that was coming in the opposite direction. We were told the cottage was way back down the mountain and asked, curiously, how we had gotten through the gate onto private property.

Seeing no place to turn around, I used a section of the road to repeatedly, but cautiously, execute three-point turns so as not to go over the edge of the mountain. The trip down felt even more treacherous. Wide awake from all the adrenaline, I clutched the steering wheel with my right hand, because my left hand and head were hanging out the window so I could see better. Karen was watching the road with great intensity and concern. Our friends in the back seat had to help with guidance, alternately sticking their heads out the windows against the cold and rain.

The fog had become much denser. The muddy road, the side of the mountain and the edge of the road often merged into one as I had a brief lapse of visibility around each descending curve. Although my speed was only five to ten miles an hour, around every bend it was impossible to distinguish whether we were on the road, near the edge, about to run into the side of the mountain or slide over the edge. There was only a small mound of dirt about a foot high (serving as the only guardrail most of the way) which I used as a guide to keep us on the road.

The following day the woman who manned the gate told me that Ripley, of *Ripley's Believe It or Not*, once said that the first mile after the gate is the most winding mile in America. We were also told that there are many dangerous drop-offs that are extremely steep and easy to go over in the dark. Although Karen did not want to return down the mountain, we had no choice. I kept repeating to her, "We

are going to make it; I have it under control. The Lord will protect us; we are going to be safe." And the Lord did get us down safely.

Isn't that the way it is with the Lord? Weary believers walking life-paths of danger and difficulty want to give up, but are told by the Lord over and over to endure, persevere and remain faithful. He is there with us and assures us that we will make it, that He will bring us safely through to our eternal Promised Land.

God did not keep the Hebrew children out of the fiery furnace, but He was with them in the midst of it. God did not prevent Daniel from being put into the lions' den, but He protected him while there. God did not smite Goliath before David encountered him, but He gave David the needed courage and strength to defeat him. God did not spare Joseph from being thrown into the pit, sold as a slave into Egypt, and locked up in a prison, but He was with him through it all. God did not save Stephen from being stoned, but He gave him the grace to endure it. God did not prevent Paul from being beaten, stoned, shipwrecked and imprisoned, but He empowered him and furthered the spread of the Gospel through it. God did not prevent John from being exiled to the Isle of Patmos, but He gave him the most amazing revelation while he was there.

Hebrews 13:5-6 contains God's promise: "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?" God will also be with us. Psalm 46:1-3, 7 proclaims:

> God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

"GLIDING" THROUGH LIFE

During a Canadian and New England speaking tour, I stopped in New Hampshire. While I was there, I saw an article in a magazine

entitled, *White Mountain Soaring*. It told about the exciting experience of going up in a glider plane (a plane without an engine). I said, "Karen, it's my birthday. How about giving me a glider plane ride for a gift?" (We realized a few hours later that it wasn't really my birthday, it was only the 27th of July, not the 28th; you lose track of time when traveling.) So Karen gave me the gift of going up in a glider for fifteen minutes at Franconia Airport.

I sat in the very front and the glider pilot sat behind me. The pilot told me he wanted me to have a better view, but I doubted it. I knew that if we crashed I was a goner because I was so close to the front! He told me that there was a lot of wind turbulence and that it would be bumpy, but that he would still take me up. They strapped me in extra tight.

Our glider plane was towed by another plane (with an engine) to about 3,000 feet. Then I heard a loud bang. I thought the front end of our plane had fallen off, but it was just the towline being released from our glider. There we were, two men 3,000 feet high with nothing but open air and the winds to keep us aloft. We were soaring through the air in a glider plane!

Sometimes it was as smooth as a Ferris wheel, the wind gently lifting the whole plane up or moving it sideways. But other times it was as wild as a roller coaster. We would be hit by a gust of wind or the pilot would do a nosedive (pushing the nose of the glider toward the ground to build up air speed) and then pull the nose up rather sharply. This "aerial roller coaster" provided a most exhilarating experience.

When we were less than 1,000 feet off the ground, going up and coming down was extremely bumpy because there was much wind turbulence. Above 1,000 feet was smooth (except for the few times wind pushed the whole plane sideways, lifted it up or pushed it down). To the west we could see into Vermont and to the east we could see into Maine. I once had a great fear of heights, but I believe in facing my fears and trusting the Lord to help me overcome them.

During the glider ride, I was enjoying myself, but I was also thinking: *We are just floating aimlessly; There is no real purpose or*

direction to it; We are just going wherever the wind happens to take us; How is it all going to work out? Many times in our walk with the Lord, we feel like we are in a glider plane. We can see no purpose to it. We reason: I am just floating aimlessly; I am not growing; I am not getting answers to prayer; Is it ever going to work out?

As we began our descent in that small glider plane, the turbulence increased in intensity. But guess what? Eventually the pilot guided that glider plane right down the center of the runway. He made a perfect landing. It turned out that we hadn't been floating aimlessly after all. There had been a purpose behind the whole thing, and it had worked out great.

The big question in coping with adversities is this: Is there a purpose for all I am going through? The answer is that if you are walking in obedience to God's Word and yielded to His Spirit, there is a purpose for everything you go through. The Lord promises us that He will be faithful, and that everything will eventually work out for good. The result will be ultimate victory!

INSPIRE YOUR GENERATION

Shortly before leading the Israelites into the Promised Land, the Lord made a brief, but profound, tribute to Moses with these simple words to Joshua: "Moses My servant is dead" (Joshua 1:2). Ponder that for a moment. God personally recognized Moses as His servant. What a great honor. Following in Moses' footprints after his death, Joshua's example of dedication to the Lord inspired his generation. Joshua's influence was felt not only during his lifetime, but for years after his death. Consider the following statement recorded in Joshua 24:31 (NASB):

> Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua ....

What an amazing example and leader Joshua must have been to accomplish such a feat! May our example and the testimony we bear motivate our children and grandchildren to live for the Lord all the

days of our lives and their lives. May they in turn influence their children and grandchildren to also serve the Lord after we are gone.

We can learn from the examples of the failures and heroes in the Bible and the mistakes and victories of those who have gone before us. Defeat or victory is determined by the choices we make. Let no one or nothing lure you away from pure devotion to Jesus Christ. May we, like Moses, be faithful in all our house (Numbers 12:7; Hebrews 3:5).

POSSESSING THE LAND

The time finally came for the children of Israel to possess the land of Canaan, which God had promised them as the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Their wilderness wandering had finally come to an end. All the fighting men 20 years and older who had murmured against God were dead. Moses had also died, so his successor, Joshua, boldly led the new generation of Israelites into the land God had promised them.

Taking the land was no easy matter. Just read the rest of the books of Numbers, Joshua and Judges. Although the Lord helped Joshua and the Israelites achieve some amazing victories, they endured six years of fierce fighting before the 12 tribes found it safe to establish their dwellings in the land. As Moses said:

> The LORD your God will drive out those nations before you, little by little. You will not be allowed to eliminate them all at once, or the wild animals will multiply around you (Deuteronomy 7:22).

God fulfilled His word and gave the Promised Land to Abraham's descendants:

> So Joshua took the entire land, just as the LORD had directed Moses, and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions (Joshua 11:23).

During the dividing of the land, Caleb, who was then 85 years old, reminded Joshua of the promise Moses had given him 45 years before:

> You know what the LORD said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me. I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, but my brothers who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt with fear. I, however, followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly. So on that day Moses swore to me, "The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the LORD my God wholeheartedly."
>
> Now then, just as the LORD promised, He has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time He said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the wilderness. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. Now give me this hill country that the LORD promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, the LORD helping me, I will drive them out just as He said (Joshua 14:6-12).

Caleb knew that the report of the 10 spies, which kindled the flame of disbelief and rebellion, concerned primarily the people and condition of this mountain area (Numbers 13:22, 28, 33). Forty-five years earlier, Caleb earnestly attempted to convince the Israelites that they could defeat these powerful people, the sight of which so distressed the 10 spies, and could possess the land (Numbers 13:30). Now Caleb, knowing he must fight to drive out the Anakim, was as willing and able to do it as he was 45 years earlier. Though his enemies were well entrenched and had made the hill country a stronghold of giants, Caleb said to Joshua, "Give me this hill country." He knew his God was able to deliver it to him.

Joshua 14:13-14 states:

> Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the LORD, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.

Judges 1:20 highlights the promise:

> As Moses had promised, Hebron was given to Caleb, who drove from it the three sons of Anak.

Just as Caleb received his temporal reward in the Promised Land, each of us, as believers in Christ, will receive our eternal reward when we get to our heavenly home. We will be richly rewarded for trusting, obeying and honoring Jesus Christ and God's Word.

Shortly before his death, Joshua summoned all Israel—their elders, leaders, judges and officials—and gave an exciting summation and warning:

> You yourselves have seen everything the LORD your God has done to all these nations for your sake; it was the LORD your God who fought for you. Remember how I have allotted as an inheritance for your tribes all the land of the nations that remain—the nations I conquered—between the Jordan and the Great Sea in the west. The LORD your God Himself will drive them out of your way. He will push them out before you, and you will take possession of their land, as the LORD your God promised you.
>
> "Be very strong; be careful to obey all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, without turning aside to the right or to the left. Do not associate with these nations that remain among you; do not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them. You must not serve them or bow down to them. But you are to hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have until now.

"The LORD has driven out before you great and powerful nations; to this day no one has been able to withstand you. One of you routs a thousand, because the LORD your God fights for you, just as he promised. So be very careful to love the LORD your God.

"But if you turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them and associate with them, then you may be sure that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the LORD your God has given you.

"Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed. But just as every good promise of the LORD your God has come true, so the LORD will bring on you all the evil He has threatened, until He has destroyed you from this good land He has given you. If you violate the covenant of the LORD your God, which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, the LORD's anger will burn against you, and you will quickly perish from the good land He has given you" (Joshua 23:3-16).

TAKE THE CHALLENGE

Today you have a choice to make. You can be like the 10 spies, rebelling in fear and disbelief, feeling defeated, murmuring, complaining and causing those around you to do the same. Or you can be like Joshua and Caleb—trusting, obeying and honoring the Lord no matter what your circumstances and inspiring others to do the same. I pray that with the Lord's help, strength and empowering, you will strive to:

- Seek His will and not your own.
- Keep your eyes on Him, not on your circumstances.
- Be patient as God works in His time and way.
- Refuse to tolerate an attitude of murmuring and complaining.
- Obey and honor Him no matter what your circumstances.
- Submit to God as He takes you through His "boot camp" and develops your character and spiritual muscles.
- Trust Him with unwavering faith.
- Persevere until you overcome every "giant" and achieve ultimate victory.

Now review each of the above and determine in your heart to live these out. Do not take this commitment lightly because the Lord will hold you to them—not calling you to perfection but encouraging you, by His grace, to follow Him wholeheartedly. If you drift, His Spirit will remind you of your commitment and draw you back.

PREPARED TO FACE "GIANTS"

A Marine fighter pilot sponsored me to speak at a men's conference for a large church from the Washington D.C. area. The day after the weekend conference, one of the attendees e-mailed me the following:

> Bill, thanks again for a powerful weekend. The "giants" were waiting for me when I got home last night. The ugliness that can come so naturally tried to rear its head immediately. I found comfort in Second Corinthians 4:8-10: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body." Thanks for the book on *Overcoming Giants*. I put it to work and turned it over to Him and He helped me regain the

discipline we so desperately need in our walk with Him. God bless.

When you face challenges and "giants" let the Apostle Paul's words in the man's letter above encourage and inspire you, as well as the following words by Paul:

> ...in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything (Second Corinthians 6:4-5, 8-10).

> ... I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? (Second Corinthians 11:23-29).

> Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither

> death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35, 37-39).
>
> I can do all this through Him [Christ] who gives me strength (Philippians 4:13).

JOSHUA'S PARTING WORDS

I conclude this book with Joshua's words to the Israelites near the end of his life. They are relevant for every believer today:

> If serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD (Joshua 24:15).

Repeat that last phrase once again to reinforce it in your heart:

> But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.

For More Information

Bill Rudge has produced numerous books, pamphlets and audio messages on a variety of timely topics. For a complete listing or a copy of his informative newsletter, visit www.billrudge.org or write to:

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